There Is A Light That Never Goes Out
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There Is A Light That Never Goes Out

by roomeight

Summary

COMPLETED - 1/08/2017. Takes place after the chart battle with Blur's 'Country House' and Oasis' 'Roll With It', and is loosely based off the comments Graham made in this article, as well as the song 'There Is A Light That Never Goes Out' by The Smiths.

Notes

Korean translation (ty Tider!): https://posty.pe/kl2dcs

- Translation into 中文-普通话 國語 available: 光明永不熄 by peekun, roomeight

Chapter 1

Graham Coxon peered down between his toes, the tips of his Converse shoes just dangling over the precipice. Swallowing, he focused on the small space between them, the blurry black and yellow outline of busy streets below him. He shivered as the frigid city wind blew against his body, miniscule in comparison to the city around him, carrying with it the lifeless sounds of horns and pedestrian walking signals.

He watched as the fuzzy outlines of yellow taxis crossed busy intersections, the small family of tourists with the wife and kids passing over the concrete below him, totally unawares of the suicide jumper standing on the ledge ten stories above them. He wondered if the sight of his broken body strewn across the concrete would ruin their vacation. He hoped not. He'd seen pictures of suicide jumpers before, post mortem.They looked peaceful, he thought, not particularly frightening, at least compared to other things anyway. And not nearly as much blood as one might think.

He shook his head, pushing the happy vacationers out of his mind. Ten stories up, he'd managed to balance himself perfectly on the fine edge of the building, poised to jump, until he heard the voice coming from the window beside him.

"What exactly are you doing?"

Graham froze completely, the hairs standing straight up on the back of his neck. He'd left his glasses inside his room, and of course without them, he couldn't see anything. After all, *why would* he need his glasses? It wasn't as if he needed to see where he was going. He wasn't here for the view, that was sure. It had seemed absurd to him to wear his glasses, so he'd left them inside, delicately placed on the table right next to the window where, a few seconds ago, his best mate's head had seemed to magically appear.

The way Damon had asked him, *what are you doing?* had sounded so casual, so incredibly laisse-faire, that for a moment, Graham almost answered him normally, as though they had just ran into one another in the pub by coincidence.

"What the fuck does it look like I'm doing?"

He immediately hated the sound of his own voice. It sounded small and squeaky on the thin air, completely unflattering in his last moments. Straining his vision, Graham tried his best to see Damon's reaction out of the corner of his eye, but failed.

"Well, don't take this the wrong way, but it looks like you might be trying to off yourself."

Forcing himself to take a deep breath, Graham closed his eyes. He didn't want to deal with this. Not now. Not with Damon especially. Most suicidals, he thought, at least had the serenity of being alone whilst trying to off themselves. Which was why, more than anything in the whole wide world, he wished he could make Damon disappear.

Mistaking Graham's lack of response as a non-answer, the singer continued talking.

"You weren't satisfied with the room's view?"

"Fucking hell, man!" Graham spat, his chest still heaving. He could feel the lump of anxiety and fear begin to ball up within his throat, the distance between him and the street below now beginning to feel immensely real to his senses.

"Right. First one then."

"Can't you fucking shut up already?" he snapped.

Graham took another deep breath, then swallowed. He noticed with unease that his fear of heights had finally crept up on him. These kinds of fears seemed unimportant in the heat of the moment. Yet now that Damon was staring at him, peering out at him with curious intent, he suddenly found himself losing grasp of his momentary fearlessness.

"I mean, can't you ever be serious? Christ, Damon, I'm about ready to jump off a window ledge and all you can do is joke."

"Sorry."

Blearily, he pressed his sweaty palms against the brick wall behind

him, his gaze still locked between his feet and the blurry landscape teetering below him. He was afraid to tear his eyes away, as though doing so might cause him to leap off at that very moment.

"Just...just stop talking, okay?"

"Okay."

There was a moment of silence between them as Graham stared downward once again. He closed his eyes, trying to catch his breath and focus on the sound of the traffic moving below them. Beside him, he could hear Damon take a long breath, as though he were about to say something, but stopped himself. The guitarist clenched his teeth, his eyes still closed.

"What?"

"Do you wanna talk about it?"

Graham bit his lip, hard, wincing as the steely taste of blood crept onto his tongue.

"Does it look like I want to fucking talk about it?"

"No," Damon responded, his voice quiet. His eyes still closed, Graham imagined Damon looking over at him, messy blonde hair over blue eyes searching him out curiously.

"Ehm, well..is there any chance I could perhaps convince you not to off yourself?"

Graham laughed, the sort of nihilistic giggle that wasn't pleasant to the ears whatsoever. He swallowed, the taste of blood in his mouth finally starting to disappate a bit.

"Not really, then?"

"Damon, just stop talking. Please."

He heard Damon quietly sigh beside him, only a few meters away, but still physically out of reach. It was funny. He could tell even now, without seeing him, the way the singer's face looked when he said things. For instance, just by picking out the certain strains in Damon's voice he could tell the difference between the singer when he was

being genuinely honest, and when he was just being a prick. The latter of which was more often that not, of course. His quiet sigh for instance, on this particular occasion, did seem rather conflicted, as much as Graham could tell. Weary, tired, perhaps a bit sad too, he thought.

Sometimes, knowing Damon as well as and for as long as he had seemed extremely detrimental to his mental health. After a while, tiring of the same pattern of reactions from his friends and family (the ones who still talked to him anyway), he had opted to shut Damon, and everyone else for that matter, out of his head for good.

After all, it's not like he had wanted anyone to come running to his rescue. He was almost certain he'd locked the deadbolt to his room's door before propping open his window and stepping out onto the ledge. He'd spoken to no one about this. No one. He'd even acted perfectly normal at the party, just the right amount of sociable, as if his plans of suicide were not imminent whatsoever. As far as Alex, Dave, and Damon had been concerned, Graham was not acting any different than his normal, anti-social, grumpy self--sans booze, drugs, and whatever else they'd forbidden him to indulge in at the record label's party.

The party. The party was shit. The whole celebration was shit, in fact, and they all knew it. Even when they heard the announcement on the radio they couldn't help but feel cheated, like everything they'd accomplished as Blur up until this point was just a scam, a publicity stunt in a half-arsed excuse for a social class war. You could see the sort of dead defeat in Damon's eyes the moment they announced that 'Country House' had hit number one, that same sort of lifeless stare he got in his eyes every night before they went on stage, like he didn't really want any of this. Like none of them really wanted this.

The only difference between Graham and the rest of them was that at least Graham didn't pretend like everything was still okay. Sure the record label was happy, they'd never been more ecstactic. After Parklife, the record executives had taken a different approach to Damon's ideas, clinging on to every bit and piece of "Britpop" rubbish the band could muster, even if it was something as shallow and lifeless as 'Country House', it didn't matter. They were too busy salvaging whatever remaining bits of this music trend they could squeeze out of them. Manufacture, package, sell, sell, sell.

And as for the real opinions of members of the band? Blur were raking

in millions from this publicity stunt. *Why not be happy?* That was the real question that had been turning around in their minds. After all, isn't this what they'd wanted? To be lifeless pop stars, loved by 50 foot long strands of 13-year-old girls with big placards in the front row, all screaming their tiny, adolescent lungs out at you, as if you were bigger than Elvis. Bigger than Jesus.

"How did you know I was here?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, I locked the door behind me. I know I did." Graham shook his head, his eyes still focused on the landscape in front of him. "There's no way in hell you would have known what I was doing unless you were following me."

Graham watched from the corner of his eye as Damon's body shifted uneasily against the window ledge.

"So what if I did follow you? What then?"

"I don't know." The guitarist bit his lip, still feeling quite unable to process what he should say next. "I really wish you hadn't."

There was a moment of silence between them before Graham cleared his throat, breaking the silence. "Do you really think that there's anything you can say to keep me from doing this?"

"I could tell you that I love you." Damon paused, looking down at his hands. "That Alex and Dave and a whole lot of other people love you, Graham. But I'm not sure that would make a difference."

Graham shook his head, saying nothing. He didn't want to respond. He'd heard people tell him this a million times before. The same pattern of response, over and over until it didn't mean anything anymore. Just a whole shit-load of melancholy rubbish, he thought, utilized at the precise moment.

"You know you left your glasses here, right?" Damon said, picking up the black frames he'd left on the table.

"Didn't think I'd need them."

He opened his eyes to see Damon looking down at the frames in his

hands, turning them over absentmindedly.

"I'm not leaving you here," he said quietly, still looking down at his hands. "I made a promise."

"I know."

Graham took a deep breath, feeling defeated as the fall breeze swept his fringe into his eyes. Ever so slowly, he lowered himself down onto the ledge so that his legs dangled. Still not completely convinced, his body language made it obvious to Damon that he was staying put on the ledge. At least for now.

He had the feeling this was going to take a while.

Chapter 2

Graham Coxon looked down between the toes of his bare feet, his legs dangling over the edge of the bridge as he focused intently on his reflection wavering faintly on the surface of the river below them. A nervous, pale, bespectacled boy stared back at him, his gangly white legs sticking out from his pants. He shivered as the faint chill of the coming fall weather blew past him, causing goosebumps to rise on his exposed skin.

The water had to have been just above freezing, this close to fall. They both knew that. They'd swam in it anyway. Beside them, abandoned near the bank of the river, the tall bottle of wine Damon had stolen from Hazel earlier this afternoon was three quarters empty, their mild drunkenness having distracted them from finishing the rest of it.

Neither of them had brought swimsuits, so they'd decided to go skinny dipping instead. Well, almost. Damon had stripped down to his knickers, his shirt having been carelessly tossed into the grass earlier. Graham, meanwhile, much more self-conscious about his own body, had opted to keep his t-shirt on, the only real exposed part of him being his too-white legs (nearly translucent when compared to Damon's, really), that he only felt mildly awkward about.

Their bodies scooted up to the edge of the bridge, both of the boys huddled together to keep warm. Graham continued to stare at the empty space between his toes, watching as the cold water rushed and carried everything away beneath them. His hands clung to one of the beams, enjoying the feel of the afternoon sun on the wood, warming it.

"Gra? Are you listening?"

Damon had been talking non-stop for quite some time now, mostly about nothing, as was typical. Every so often, Graham would, out of habit, chime in a comment or a nod to let him know that he was indeed still listening, to let Damon know that his words weren't falling on entirely deaf ears. He got the feeling that after all these years, Damon had finally let on to Graham's type of half-arsed listening and

accepted his mild responses (or lack of response), and chose to keep talking anyway.

"Mmm?" The young bespectacled boy smiled, looking up toward Damon. "Sorry." He smiled apologetically. Uncut strands of brown fringe hung lazily over his eyes, his imitation of the floppy sort of hairdo he'd seen some of his favorite bands wear recently, their eyes hidden behind messy bangs. Of course it kept him from seeing properly most of the time, but he didn't seem to mind.

"I said, I think we should start a band."

Graham shook the fringe out of his eyes, giving Damon a sort of upside down frown. "Oh, yeah?"

"No, really. I mean—I mean, I think we could make it big."

He watched as Damon looked him over, his bright blue eyes so full of confidence it almost made Graham giggle. "We?"

"Yes, of course, we, silly. You think I wouldn't want you to be alongside me the entire time?"

"A band? I don't know about that, Day."

"Why not?"

Graham shook his head. "Nevermind."

"No, really. Why not?"

Graham frowned. He wanted to point out that starting a band would be ridiculous because both of them knew that he was leaving for college in a few days, and that they wouldn't be seeing one another until next summer anyway. Still, he knew that mentioning the obvious would only dampen Damon's spirit, so he decided not to.

"Well, what if we ever broke up? Or if we had creative differences? We'd hate each other and stop being friends."

He watched as Damon looked back at him, half-frowning and half-perplexed by the idea of what he was saying.

"Or, you'd go solo and then you wouldn't need me anymore." Graham

continued, biting his lip and looking up at his best friend.

"I wouldn't ever do that." Damon responded, a slight defensiveness to his tone.

Graham raised his eyebrows.

"Oh really?

"Really."

"Well then, how do you know that you wouldn't?"

"Well, it'd prolly be a pretty stupid idea, first of all," Damon began, laughing, as if the answer was obvious. "What would I do without a guitarist?"

"Mmm. Yeah." Graham smirked, shaking the messy fringe out of his eyes for the umptenth time. "You playing guitar by yourself would be pretty terrible now that I think about it."

Damon narrowed his eyes, his left arm shoving at Graham playfully. "Hey, I'm not that bad at guitar. And I'm better at keyboards than you. And I can sing too."

"Yeah." Graham practiced his best smirk, avoiding Damon's gaze. "You just keep telling yourself that, Day."

"Fuck off!" Damon laughed, shoving a giggling Graham sideways with enough force to almost knock him off the bridge. "Really! I'm being serious, you prat."

Graham grabbed his sides, giggling as he tried half-heartedly to muster the best somber face he could. "Okay, okay, I'm being serious now. Very serious."

"I want you to promise me something before you leave." Damon said, very matter-of-fact, as though Graham had no say. "And I want you to actually be serious about it for one second, okay?"

Graham couldn't help but want to giggle at seeing Damon look at him so solemnly. After all, it was hard to take Damon seriously most of the time, let alone after almost half a bottle of wine. Still, he managed to control himself.

"Fuck, yes, all right. I'm being serious." Graham said somberly, trying his best to reassure him. "Now what is it?"

He watched as Damon broke eye contact with him for a moment, as though he were embarrassed of what he was about to say next.

"I want you to promise me, that after this year, even after you go to London and I don't see you for a while..." Damon started, turning to look at him. "That we'll still stick together, that you won't forget about me."

"Damon..."

"That if you ever get famous, or become the next Andy Warhol or whatever, that you won't forget about us being best friends."

Graham frowned, looking up at Damon from underneath his fringe.

"I hate Andy Warhol."

"And that we'll always keep being friends," Damon continued, graciously ignoring Graham's cheek. "No matter how much of outright bastards we may act toward one another. "

Graham frowned again. "I don't know, Damon—that's kind of hard to predict, don't you think?"

He found it amusing that Damon thought he could forget him. Like all the important parts of their adolescent friendship could be shuffled away and forgotten, cast out in favor of college life. The growing-up-and-out-of-Colchester life. Graham wanted to get out of Colchester more than anything else. In all honesty, he'd chosen to go to Goldsmith's because he knew it was his golden ticket out of suburbia, away from the droll, middle-class neighborhoods of Essex and into the city. London. The real, exciting, terrifying, expensive, and probably overrated London that he'd always grown up watching on television. He couldn't have been happier to leave to go to art school. Yet at the same time, it was bittersweet, his new sense of freedom only tainted by the fact that his best friend wasn't coming with him.

"Just—just promise me, okay?"

"Damon..."

"Please?"

He sighed, smiling. "Okay. I promise."

"Promise on something important, so I know you're serious."

Graham sighed, rolling his eyes. "God."

"Come on."

"Okay. I promise on..." Graham thought for a moment, biting his lip. "I promise on my mother's grave, okay?"

"Til the day you die?"

"Til the day I die." Graham reassured him, a bemused smile on his face as he realized the childishness of their conversation. Damon could be overly dramatic when it came to these types of things, he thought, but he found it endearing. Damon was full of drama; Graham was not. At least, not when he was sober. Which was probably one of the reasons why they were still best friends.

When you're a kid, you'd do anything to stick with your best friend. Changing schools, living in different neighborhoods—these were traumatic when you were nine, ten, twelve years old. And for better or worse, Damon and Graham had been lucky enough to survive all that and remain friends. But now, now Damon wasn't going to be with him. He'd be completely alone, in London by himself. Without Damon. Without anyone. The thought of being that alone frightened him, but he quickly pushed it out of his head, not wanting to make the situation any more somber than it already was.

I'll miss you. He remembered that was the first thing Damon said to him, his voice sounding small and distant on the other end of the phone when Graham called to tell him he'd just been accepted to Goldsmith's. It was almost as if, in that instant, they both knew things were going to change. Graham's life in Colchester would be left behind, regardless of how many promises he made to visit. A week later, when Damon called him to let him know he'd been accepted in acting school, they knew their fate was sealed. Goldsmith's was a long way away from the acting school Damon had been accepted into, and any free time they had in between school terms would be filled with family visits.

"I still can't believe I'm leaving in two days," Graham said, thinking out loud.

"Yeah." Damon responded, looking down, his fingernails picking away at the paint of the bridge beneath them.

"It's weird that I'm not going to see you." Graham looked over at Damon, who was still avoiding eye contact with him.

"Yeah."

"I'll miss you," Graham said finally, trying to keep his voice as neutral as possible.

Damon looked up slowly. He smiled from underneath his blonde fringe. Quickly, and without refrain, he kissed Graham squarely on the cheek, ruffling his hair as he did so.

"I'll miss you too," he affirmed, looking away as he said it. Graham couldn't tell if Damon broke eye contact because he meant it, or because he was trying to sound like he didn't. Either way, he felt his heart sink a little bit, his cheek still tingling from where Damon had so briefly kissed him. It was an odd sensation, and one he wished he could cling to.

Out of the corner of his eye, Graham watched Damon, trying to read him. His facial expressions, his body language. His lean arms hung lazily from the bridge's beams above them. Graham quickly studied his friend's face, using their brief moment of silence to attempt to pencil in all the details of him, all the aspects of him he knew he didn't want to forget—the way the sun hit the bright blue of his eyes, the upturned corner of his lips as he smiled, the nearly invisible smattering of freckles across the bridge of his nose.

"Graham, are you okay?"

Graham blinked, snapping out of his train of thought.

"What?"

"You've been staring at nothing but my chest for the last five minutes."

"Oh. Sorry."

"We should probably head back to my house now," Damon said, quickly changing the subject. "Just, you know, so Hazel doesn't get suspicious or anything."

Graham nodded, pulling himself and Damon up. He wobbled a bit as

he did so, still uneasy on his feet from the wine. Damon, still unbalanced himself, wrapped his arm around Graham's shoulders, throwing him a wide grin as they headed down the path together.

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It wasn't long before they reached Damon's house, their clothes still damp from the river. Hazel took little notice of either of the tipsy teenagers as they headed up the stairs to Damon's bedroom, closing the door tightly behind them. Graham, exhausted from the heat outside, sighed as he collapsed on Damon's bed, his bare toes sticking out and over the edge.

Damon meanwhile, was still preoccupied, his t-shirt tied lazily around his naked brown shoulders as he rummaged underneath his bed for something. After a moment, he reemerged, a shiny jewel-case, headphones, and Walkman in his hands before collapsing on the bed next to Graham.

Damon's bed was large enough to fit the both of them, but barely, their shoulders and heads almost touching as they laid back. His eyes closed, Graham could hear the miniscule noise of Damon's headphones beside him, and for some reason, painfully aware of their closeness to one another. For reasons he couldn't quite place, Graham suddenly felt the need to lay his arm across him, to initiate some sort of physical contact between their bodies. It was a feeling that bothered Graham, for more reasons than he could place. After a few moments, he decided against it, focusing instead on the sound of Damon breathing, the music from his headphones still blaring as they fell asleep next to one another.

When Graham woke up again, it was to the sound of something he didn't recognize. At first, he couldn't quite place it, not sure if he had been woken up by the sound of a car door slamming, or a telephone, or a voice coming from downstairs. After a few seconds though, he heard the noise again, and a wave of realization crept over him. It was Damon's voice all right, but deeper, lower—stifled.

"Day?" Graham said softly, raising his head up a bit to see the singer's face.

Damon's eyes were tightly shut, his head halfway buried in the pillow beneath him. Graham watched as the other boy's face made tiny,

frustrated movements, as though he were trying to communicate something to his body, but couldn't quite get it to respond. For a moment, he wondered if Damon had been talking in his sleep again, and that was what had woken him up. And then Damon moaned.

Not just any moan, either. It was a deep, sensual, almost throaty moan, unlike anything Graham had ever heard come out of a girl, let alone his best friend. And what was even more unsettling, in spite of all this, was that the name Damon was moaning was his.

The guitarist froze, completely immobile as he watched the body beside him. He mind raced with newfound revelations.

Yes, Damon was having a wet dream beside him. Yes, it seemed to be about him. Yes, it was kind of awkward. And yet, for some reason it wasn't awkward enough for him to immediately jump out of bed and wake Damon up.

Frantically, he attempted to search his brain for an appropriate response to the situation, but failed miserably. Still thinking, he heard Damon moan beside him once again, his whole body moving as he did so. Within seconds, Damon had removed whatever personal space they had left between them, sandwiching a very bewildered Graham against the wall.

Graham wanted more than anything to be able to move, to push Damon off of him and run back home, pretending like nothing had ever happened. But he couldn't. Damon had, purposely or not, trapped him, his arm pinned underneath the weight of Damon's body when he had moved forward.

"Damon?" He almost squeaked, struggling to remove his arm from underneath the singer.

"Mmm, Graham?" Damon responded breathily, his eyes still closed. Graham couldn't tell if he was talking in his sleep or if he had actually heard him.

"Um..." Graham responded, gnawing on his lower lip. "Do you—um, do you think you could, uh—"

"Mmm, Gra," he heard Damon sigh, his eyes still closed. He felt Damon's body move beside him, his hand slipping around Graham's waist and pulling them closer together. "Don't leave yet—please..."

Graham knew he should have pushed Damon off a long time ago,

woken him up and told him how silly he was being. But no, now here he was, his body trapped underneath Damon's, his lips only a few inches away from his best mate's. His body and mind were torn at Damon's bizarre form of affection, purposeful or not as it was. He licked his lips, all the logic in his mind now completely defeated by the strange new sensations he was feeling, the sense of immorality, the awkwardness, the claustrophobia, and the very strong desire to kiss his best friend.

So, he did.

With his eyes wide open, Graham kissed Damon, his dry lips barely connecting with the Damon's, just close enough to taste the sweet wine on his breath momentarily, and nothing more.

The singer stirred, his lips parting once again as he said something comprehensible.

"Gra..." Damon almost whispered, pressing his hips against the guitarist's."Don't leave—want you..."

Graham froze, petrified at the thought that maybe all of this was really a joke, that Damon had just been faking being asleep in order to test him, to get a reaction out of him. After a few seconds, nothing happened and Graham felt a bit relieved, despite still being trapped underneath Damon's body.

Acting against his own inhibitions, Graham moved to kiss him again, his hand wandering as he did so, his fingertips tentatively trailing up and down the soft skin of Damon's chest. It was strange territory for Graham, his mouth exploring Damon's for the first time. He closed his eyes, giving in to bittersweet taste of wine mixed with the subtle taste of cigarettes, the the latter of which Damon thought Graham didn't know about, but did.

The thought scared him, but Graham liked the feeling of Damon's lips pressed against his own, the bizarre pleasure it gave him having their bodies be so close. He wondered if, when Damon woke up, if he would mind finding his best mate kissing him, if he would like it just as much as he did now, maybe even more. If he was moaning Graham's name because he wanted this all along, but had been afraid to act upon it. At the same time he imagined Damon waking up, his blue eyes widened in shock as he roughly pushed Graham off the bed, calling him pervert and a queer for kissing him and telling him to get the hell out.

He wasn't sure why, but the thought of doing this to Damon while he was asleep made him feel invincible, as though the normal rules of friendship between them didn't apply. As though kissing and grinding against one another in the same bed, half-naked, was perfectly normal, and even welcome. Thus, when his hand moved downward to caress between Damon's legs, and he heard himself moan at the thought of touching him, it didn't occur to him that he might wake Damon up by doing so.

Which was why when Graham opened his eyes again, he froze, petrified at the sight of a pair of very bewildered blue eyes looking right back at him.

Damon said nothing at first, the shock of waking up with his best mate's hand on his cock most likely keeping him at a loss for words. Meanwhile, Graham stared back, his eyes pacing left and right with uncertainty. He braced himself knowingly, fully aware that any moment now Damon was probably going to hit him. He braced himself for the violence, for the pain, for Damon's fist to connect with his face and kick him off the bed. He waited. But nothing happened.

They lay in silence as several seconds passed, neither of them doing anything as their bodies stayed together. Emotions passed over Damon's face faster than Graham could read them. Terror, anger, confusion, pleasure.

Pulling back, Graham opened his mouth to speak, but stopped, unsure of what to say. Damon looked as though he wanted to say, "Graham, what the fuck are you doing?", but the words just wouldn't come out.

Graham knew that at this point it could go one way or the other. They could pull away from one another, sit at opposite ends of the bed, and try to pretend that nothing like this had ever happened. Or, Graham could go on touching him and hope to God that Damon was somehow okay with that.

"Are you going to hit me?" Graham asked, swallowing slowly.

Damon stared back at him blankly, his face as pale as the paint on the wall behind him.

"No."

The words were barely out of Damon's mouth before Graham made his executive decision, kissing him hard on the lips. In the few seconds of decision making that Graham had had, he'd decided that most of him

was afraid to hear what Damon would say. Talking was the last thing he wanted them to do, and Graham made that very apparent as he pressed his hips forward, a low moan emitting from Damon as he did so. Still keeping his mouth attached to Damon's, Graham began to let his hands wander once again, his fingers tugging at the hem of Damon's pants, searching, feeling, touching the skin he'd always looked at there.

Without a word, he moved downward, keeping eye contact with Damon the entire time. Gently, he placed his lips over one of Damon's nipples, sucking gently. Above him, he felt the singer's body stir, his eyes a glassy blue as he watched Graham kiss him. After a few seconds, he felt hands at his sides, and he froze, thinking that perhaps Damon was going to hurt him finally. But instead, he felt Damon pulling at the hem of his shirt, lifting the fabric up and over his head until Graham was mostly naked as well. He watched as Damon looked up at him, his eyes traveling over his pale bare chest, taking him in. Graham felt terribly self-conscious, his long arms covering himself as Damon took him in. He'd always made a point to never let Damon see him like this, always being modest when changing in his presence for fear of Damon finding him disgusting, or too thin, or too frail for his liking.

Suddenly, he felt Damon's arms wrap around his back, pushing him forward so that their lips almost touched. Graham avoided Damon's gaze as best he could, feeling embarrassed about his sudden nakedness.

"I'm sorry," Graham blurted out suddenly, as though saying so might make the situation seem less awkward. He wasn't sure what he was apologizing for, really. It wasn't until he felt Damon's mouth at his ear that he finally loosened up.

"Don't be."

Graham felt himself relax against Damon's body, letting the singer's hands touch him for the first time. He bit back a moan as he felt Damon's hand pause between his legs, caressing him. He inhaled sharply as Damon's hand moved underneath the hem of his briefs and he began to touch real flesh.

Damon's mouth at his ear, they began to move, breathing heavily as they did so. Graham could feel himself losing his reserve, knowing well enough that he wouldn't last long. Pulling himself away from Damon's touch he moved downward, taking Damon into his mouth,

his own hand replacing Damon's. The feeling of having a cock in his mouth for the first time was bewildering, not at all like anything he'd ever done before. Still, he moved his mouth slowly, sucking and moving his head as he felt the singer's hands on his head, guiding them both into a rhythm they both felt comfortable at.

Above him, he could hear the singer moaning quietly, his hands buried in the guitarist's hair as his mouth moved languidly over him. After a while, Graham began to feel more comfortable, his tongue swirling and doing things he thought Damon might enjoy, his mewls of pleasure only further encouraging Graham to experiment.

At one point, Graham looked up to meet Damon's gaze, glassy blue as he watched the guitarist. It was a strange look, not unwanted, but unfamiliar, as though both of them couldn't help but admit that they wanted this. That whatever happened afterward, whatever words were exchanged afterward were worth it for the pleasure of finally being able to touch and taste one another.

It wasn't long before Graham felt Damon's body shudder underneath him, his voice moaning Graham's name as he finally came. The guitarist came soon after, the taste of Damon still on his tongue as he collapsed on the bed next to his lover, his whole body trembling as the afterglow washed over him. After a few moments, he felt Damon's warm arms around him, wordless as he pulled their bodies closer and they lay together, the afternoon sun spilling over them as they fell asleep together for the second time.

*

When Damon woke up again, the sun was low in the sky. He couldn't see the clock from here, but he knew he'd had to have been sleeping for a while. Turning his head toward the wall, he noticed Graham had disappeared, his body replaced instead by folds of cold fabric and sheets. Damon reached out his hand to touch the spot where Graham had been, as though perhaps the ghost of him were still there. His mind was muddled, the thoughts of what they'd done finally starting to sink in, and knowing, somehow, that despite his promise, he wouldn't hear from Graham again until next summer.

Chapter 3

Graham barely remembered the first time (and the last time) he kissed Jamie Hewlett, although Damon never forgot. It was the night Alex James, then just a kid he'd met in one of his classes at Goldsmith's, convinced him to go to a party held at one of his friend's houses.

"It's just a little get-together," he had said. "It'll be fun."

But Graham was doubtful. His initial feeling was that going to the party was a bad idea, and in the end, he was probably right. But Alex, as he would find out much, much later, had a dangerous talent for convincing people to do things they'd rather not. So, he went.

Graham arrived at the party dressed in torn jeans and his favorite jumper, all brown and yellow stripes, and thick framed glasses. Most people would have thought he looked like a bumblebee, and this was good. Painfully bright colors, he decided, might convince people to stay away. And for the most part, it worked.

For the majority of the night, he had stood quietly next to Alex, practicing his best wallflower stance as the other student skillfully chatted up girls, some of whom were attractive, some not. In all truthfulness, Graham was convinced that he would have performed better as a lawn ornament than a person, really. Especially with the way girls looked at him, with that sideways sort of glance, as though just perceiving him as a socialite were painful.

Not all of them were bad, though. The girl Alex was currently trying to introduce Graham to was a rather sheepish redhead with long hair and a particularly questionable choice of outfit, which Graham thought looked as though she might have picked it out of her grandmother's closet. She was shy, though, and as far as Graham could tell, she was nice, although not very smart, which was disappointing. This didn't stop Alex, however, from elbowing Graham painfully in the ribs mid-conversation.

"Oh, you should see Graham's work. He's very good at painting. Aren't you, Graham?" Alex asked rather pointedly, giving him a 'you'd-better-start-pulling-your-own-weight-here-I-can't-do-this-forever' sort of look.

Graham winced from the pain in his ribs and then nodded. "Um, yeah. I suppose."

"He's just being modest." Alex interceded, smiling before taking a long sip from his drink. He cleared his throat rather abruptly.

Graham couldn't help but feel as bit sorry for ruining Alex's plan to get him laid tonight, but he had other things on his mind that were keeping him from thinking properly. Like Damon being here. This was a revelation to Graham, of course, because no one had bothered telling him. Or rather, Damon hadn't bothered. In fact, it wasn't until he heard a familiar voice say, "Fancy seeing you here, Gra," that he was aware of his best friend's presence in London.

"What are you doing here?" Graham asked, his eyes wide.

Damon raised his eyebrows. "Oh, did your mum not tell you? I switched schools a couple weeks ago. The place I was at was rubbish."

Graham opened his mouth to say something, but stopped, realizing that everyone around them would hear them. Instead, he opted to keep quiet, his mind swimming with the thought of his best friend kissing him as Damon embraced him in a friendly hug. Conflicted, he couldn't decide whether or not to be happy or angry that his best mate was here, and without his knowing.

A couple of weeks. Graham repeated Damon's words over and over in his head. Damon had been here for a couple of weeks, and yet he hadn't even bothered to get in touch with him? Had he really forgotten him that quickly?

He looked up to see Damon sitting across from him on the opposite couch, a wide grin on his face as he flirted with some girl Alex had introduced Graham to earlier. Justine, if he remembered correctly. She'd arrived with another man, Brett, a very tall, thin character with an almost translucent complexion and a very terrible laugh. Both of them had nicotine-stained fingertips, and both told him they were in a band together. Something avant-garde, they had said. Graham disliked them both immediately, of course, but now that Damon was talking to them instead of him, he disliked them even more.

He'd just escaped from the rather droll and irritating conversation between Damon and Justine (God, he hated that name), who seemed to, at the moment, have his best mate secured conversationally by the balls, to sit with Alex instead. Now that Justine was around, Damon seemed to have conveniently forgotten about Graham's existence at

this party altogether.

It didn't seem to matter to Damon that she wasn't single, that wasn't a problem to him. Then again, conflicts with commitment had never stopped Damon before. In fact, he barely stuttered in the presence of her looming boyfriend Brett, pale, eerie complexion and all. Perhaps years of dating his enemies' girlfriends in high school had made him feel invincible, he thought.

Graham winced as a sharp stab of pain tore through his side, Alex's elbow being the culprit. He glanced over to see Alex looking at him curiously.

"You okay, Graham?"

He nodded, still feeling a bit out of it. "Yeah, yeah."

Alex looked down at his empty drink. "You want me to go get you another one?"

Graham shook his head, recognizing this as an opportunity for escape. "No, thanks. I'll go get one myself."

Excusing himself, he headed toward the kitchen, his thoughts muddled as he navigated his way through the house. Halfway there, he felt someone collide into him, almost knocking him over entirely. He grimaced as he felt the person's drink soak into the front of his brown and yellow jumper.

"Shit! I'm sorry about that, mate," the man quickly apologized, laughing a bit as he attempted in vain to towel his drink off of Graham's jumper. It was a polite gesture, Graham thought, but not worth much.

"Damn, I'm not sure this is helping much." The other man frowned, setting his glass down. He gave Graham a sort of upside down frown before peering at him curiously. "Have we met before?"

Graham shook his head, taking in the blonde-haired, brown-eyed man in front of him. He'd never seen him before in his life.

"Don't think so."

"Oh? Well, I'm Jamie." He said, smiling and extending his hand to Graham. "This is my house." He added, after seeing the blank look on Graham's face.

"Oh, right." Graham blushed, shaking Jamie's hand. "I'm Graham."

"You know, I think I might have a shirt you could wear instead." Jamie nodded to Graham's stained jumper. "I feel awfully bad for ruining your jumper. Not a very good first impression, I'm afraid."

Graham nodded, still feeling a bit awkward, but happy to have had his thoughts about Damon somewhat derailed. "Sure."

"There's the bathroom." Jamie pointed out a door at the end of the hallway. "If you want, maybe you can see if you can wash it out while I find you something to wear, okay?"

"Okay." Graham smiled, looking back and shutting the bathroom door behind him. Hesitantly, he looked at himself in the mirror, the large wet stain prominently displayed on the front of his jumper. Aside from the stain, he still looked like a mess, he thought. He sighed, taking note of the dark circles underneath his eyes before pulling his jumper up and over his head. No wonder the girls were scared of him, he thought.

Turning on the faucet, he attempted to wash out the red liquid, but after a few minutes, his efforts seemed fruitless. The stain was set, and he was fairly certain that the jumper was ruined. In the back of his head, he wondered if Damon was still talking to Justine, or if he'd even noticed that Graham had gone missing yet. It was in the middle of one of these thoughts, in which he was feeling particularly sorry for himself, that he heard a sharp knock on the door.

"Come on in."

He watched as Jamie closed the door behind him, giving the half-naked Graham a bit of an up-and-down look before handing him the t-shirt. Graham figured his naked skin must have looked translucent in this light, but he didn't care. He probably wouldn't talk to anyone after this party anyway.

"Here you go. Hope this fits. I think we're about the same size."

"Thanks," Graham managed a weak smile before taking the shirt from him.

"Don't take this the wrong way, cause I just met you and all..." Jamie began, leaning against the door. "But you look a little bit down, mate. Is everything okay?"

Graham laughed a bit half-heartedly, picking up his glasses and putting them on again. "Um. To be honest, not really."

Jamie frowned, crossing his arms and giving Graham a bit of a quizzical look. "Some girl got you down or something?"

"Um. Sort of. Something like that. It's complicated." Graham shrugged, feeling strange that someone he didn't even know was trying to comfort him.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Jamie offered, sounding much more sympathetic than Graham expected.

The guitarist bit his lip, feeling a bit conflicted in his emotional state. Jamie didn't know who'd he'd be talking about, right? So why would it hurt to talk to him? If anything, it would at least give him an excuse not to be around Damon and Justine flirting with one another for a little while longer.

Sighing, he began to explain his night to Jamie, every word and feeling slipping out and sounding much more girlish and pathetic than it did in his own head. He mentioned Damon and Justine, and how he'd felt left out all night, not to mention how upset he was that Damon had seemingly forgotten about him within the matter of a year, although he made a point not to mention anything about what had happened last summer.

"So you're angry that you're best mate is talking up this Justine girl, right?" Jamie reiterated, raising an eyebrow.

"Yeah. I guess."

"And that bothers you because you feel like he doesn't give a toss about you, his best mate, anymore. Right?"

"Sort of. I mean, she does have a boyfriend, after all." Graham pointed out, feeling cheated.

Jamie became silent for a moment, giving Graham a hard look. "You know, I think you seem more bothered by the idea of this girl than the fact that he didn't call you."

"You do?"

Jamie nodded, biting his thumb and looking down at the ground. "You know, Graham, you don't have to be embarrassed or anything. You

can tell me anything. I won't think of you any different."

Graham frowned, a puzzled look on his face. "What do you mean?"

He watched as Jamie leaned forward, placing a hand on his back. "If you're gay, you can just tell me." He shrugged, laughing. "It kind of comes with the territory, really. If you know what I mean."

Graham froze, suddenly feeling all the blood drain out of his face.

"I'm not--I'm not...gay." Graham shook his head quickly, now feeling incredibly embarrassed. "What makes you think...?"

"Well, the way you talk about this Damon guy, for one. You talk about him like you would some girl, like you're jealous of him paying attention to this Justine and not you."

Graham shook his head again, still feeling very confused and misunderstood and incredibly embarrassed. "Not like that, though. I'm not gay."

"You're sure about that?"

Graham nodded, now feeling somewhat uncomfortable with how close Jamie was next to him.

"Well, if you're not gay, then you wouldn't mind if I did this, would you?"

Graham watched in confusion as Jamie closed the distance between them, his hand wrapping around the back of Graham's neck. He froze, feeling even more confused then before, the warm and wet feeling of Jamie's lips pressed against his own completely unprecedented. Jamie was almost like Damon, he thought, but different. His mouth, his movements, his touch was markedly aggressive, yet tender. Not nearly as submissive as Damon had been. It surprised Graham that someone almost the same size as him could have that much power.

The guitarist closed his eyes, loosening up a bit as Jamie's tongue slipped inside his mouth for the first time. He shivered as Jamie's hands wandered over his bare chest, his cold fingertips inciting chills as he roughly pinned Graham against the bathroom wall. He inhaled sharply as Jamie's mouth traveled to his neck, sucking and biting at the sensitive skin with the sort of speed and adeptness that he was not used to.

He moaned as Jamie's mouth discovered the sensitive patch of skin right above his collarbone, skillfully inciting enough of a reaction from Graham that he was almost certain there would be a mark there in the morning. Sighing, he ran his fingers through the other man's hair, biting his lip as he felt Jamie's hands slip around the small of his back, and then slyly grab his arse tightly. He moaned, thrusting forward and feeling the other man's erection beneath tight jeans.

Pulling apart, he looked up at Jamie, a wicked grin on his face as they caught their breath.

"So, are you still sure?"

Graham laughed, still breathless. He felt Jamie's lips against his stomach, each kiss growing closer and closer to his waistband. This was definitely not what he had been expecting, but maybe that was a good thing, he thought, closing his eyes as he felt Jamie's mouth linger near his cock. He bit his lip as he felt Jamie's hands at his belt, quickly unbuckling and unbuttoning everything that stood in his way.

"Fuck. Are you going to--" Graham began, but stopped, hearing the bathroom door open unceremoniously.

"Cor! Sorry, mate. Didn't know someone was in here."

Graham instantly recognized the voice as Damon's, his whole body tensing up. He looked toward the door, the visage of Damon looking at the both of them, shirtless and practically fucking in the middle of the bathroom. He watched as blue eyes connected with his own, a terrible electric blue that refused to accept what it was seeing, his best friend half-naked in the arms of another man he didn't recognize. The colors drained out of Damon's face almost instantaneously. He stood frozen in the doorway for a moment, his mouth opening, then closing, then opening, then closing again as though he were having an internal argument with himself.

"Sorry." Damon muttered quickly, his face still white. Graham watched as his expression changed from shock to what looked like confusion, and then a bewildered sort of pain. In a matter of seconds, he broke eye contact with Graham, shutting the door quickly without saying another word.

Graham stared blankly at the door for a few seconds, as though in shock, trying to compute what had just happened. He felt Jamie pull away from him a little bit.

"I take it that was him?"

Graham nodded, still staring at the door.

"Sorry about that, mate." Jamie frowned and pulled away, but not before giving Graham a quick kiss on the forehead. "You didn't tell me he liked you too."

****

Graham looked down at the cup of tea in front of him, the milk he'd just poured in swirling around cloudily. Absentmindedly, he picked up his spoon, hypnotized by the counter-clockwise motion and the sound of Damon's words floating over him from the other side of the table.

"Thanks again for having lunch with me, Gra. It means a lot," he heard Damon say over the sound of the diner.

Graham nodded, still staring down at his tea as the Beatles' 'You're Gonna Lose That Girl' twanged distantly on the overhead radio. He frowned. He couldn't stand the Beatles. Except for George. George was the only good one.

"I wanted to talk to you about what happened at the party."

Graham swallowed, still hypnotized by his tea. He couldn't look up at Damon even if he wanted to.

"You remember that girl I was talking to?"

Graham looked up, biting his lip. He nodded. "Yeah. What about her?"

"Well, I wanted to know what you thought."

Graham paused. Overhead he could hear Paul singing, *"You're going to lose that girl, you're going to lose that girl..."*

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I was thinking...I like her a lot."

Graham laughed half-heartedly. "Uh, yeah. I noticed."

"And I was thinking, well, you know...that I might get with her."

"Oh."

"And you know, I wanted to know what you thought of her." Graham felt Damon's hand slide onto the top of his own. Graham pictured Damon, the expression on his face as Graham went down on him, his glassy blue eyes looking down at him. "You know, being my best mate and all. Your opinion matters."

Graham felt his heart sink, as though whatever anchor had previously holding it up in the proper place had just been ripped out by those two particular words. *Best mate.* Is that all he would ever be to him?

Feeling hopeless, Graham practiced his best fake smile. He stirred his tea.

"Oh, Justine? She's nice." He paused. "Isn't she dating someone though?"

"Well, yes." He watched Damon's face change from composed to uneasy. "But after what happened that night, I don't think she's going to stay with him."

After what happened that night? One didn't have to be a genius to know what Damon meant by that.

"I mean, I know it sounds silly, but I think I really love her. I mean, she's....she's different, you know? She's not like any girl I've ever known."

Graham cleared his throat, feeling a tad nauseated as he took a particularly long swig of his tea. In the background he could hear Paul and John's voices serenading, *"You're going to lose that girl, I'll make a point of taking her away from you..."*

"That sounds great, Day." Graham forced another plastic smile, reaching for more milk. He poured it in slowly, watching as the strains of white separated themselves from the amber liquid."Really. I'm happy for you."

"Thanks, Gra." He watched as Damon's blue eyes lit up from the other

side of the table. "I knew you'd understand."

Graham nodded, feeling hollow as he felt Damon remove his hand from his own. He thought of Jamie, the feeling of his mouth against his own, the chills he got as his fingertips traced naked skin. He thought of what Jamie had said to him that night, after he'd kissed him on the forehead and apologized. The words echoed in his mind, over and over. "You know, I think you deserve a lot better than him."

Overhead, he listened to the last few strains of the song play out on the radio. He thought about how much he hated The Beatles, and then he wondered what George would think.

Chapter 4

The first window gave way the easiest. It crumbled underneath the bat like sugar candy, splintering and shattering, the sound of it stark against the silence of the desert night around him. In the distance he could see the sun beginning to rise, a sliver of orange just above the horizon.

Damon's words, his face, devoid of any apologetic demeanor, played in Graham's head over and over again, like a bad play written into the fabric of his consciousness.

He was sick of the mind games; of the discomforting notion that Damon was well aware of what he was doing to him, yet refused to change, to let go of her for once. He thought back to the summer, so many years ago now, to the boy he left sleeping in a bed on a warm afternoon in Colchester. How now he only seemed to find small remnants of that sleeping boy, all red cheeks and pale skin and blue eyes...and laughing, happy, naive.

How different each of them were now.

How Damon looked at him so differently now.

Not with naive guilt, or the almost-guilt of a child who knows he has been naughty, but real, adult guilt. The kind that, when Graham looked in his eyes while they were kissing, let him know without a doubt that Damon was thinking of her.

He had called her earlier that day, Graham thought, to explain. To tell her the truth, to finally come out with it after all these months, come clean about everything that had happened between him and Graham recently....that things were different now. That he'd made a mistake and that he was sorry, real sorry, but he wasn't in love with her anymore. At least, that was the plan.

They'd stumbled off the bus weakly, the heat of the sun beating down on their sunburnt, dehydrated bodies. Texas, they had found, was God's cruelest trick on a group of boys from Essex who weren't used to such types of things.

Graham took a deep breath as he felt Damon's body brush past him on the way off the bus. He looked up, blue eyes awkwardly meeting brown for a few seconds before looking away.

"You okay, mate?" he heard Alex ask from behind him, squeezing Graham's shoulders reassuringly.

"Yeah," the guitarist responded hollowly. He looked back at Alex, as if to reassure him. "I'm fine."

He didn't want to be so obvious, but it was hard. Damon wasn't making this easy for either of them.

The door jingled cheerfully as he walked inside, the sudden blast of too much air conditioner disorienting him for a moment. His eyes made a quick scan of the store, flicking back and forth before pausing to look at Damon standing just outside the window, next to the pay phone, his back towards him.

Damon hadn't said more than three words to him the last two days. Ever since Graham had brought it up, the problem of Justine, Damon had retracted himself completely from him. No kind words, brief eye contact, if any--he barely acknowledged Graham's existence.

Digging his hands into his jeans pockets, Graham made a pointed effort to look away, trying instead to feign interest in the aisle of frozen food in front of him. Around him stood the type of people whom he had come to associate with the term "Western Americans": a group of mostly boot- and cowboy-hat wearing middle class farmers with bad taste in plaid, and an even worse accent.

Part of him knew that his judgement was harsh, that this was just the area they were in, but the stereotype still clung to him like a wet mold, thrust into his already disillusioned notions of what he'd always imagined America to be like, and how it really wasn't.

He walked up to the counter, self-consciously making an effort to lower his voice before speaking, as though revealing himself as a foreigner would lead to questions he wasn't in the mood to answer at the moment.

"Could I get a pack of fags--er, cigarettes?" he muttered, just loud enough that it was understandable. The clerk looked at him a bit strangely, as though Graham were some sort of endangered species

he'd never seen before.

"What kind?"

"Ummmm. Newport." The guitarist looked down nervously, fumbling around with the un-familar paper notes in his hand. Carefully, and at a bit of guess, he laid down a five dollar bill, waited for his change (to his relief), and slid the newly bought pack of cigarettes into his back pocket.

He'd nearly made it to the door before he felt someone grab him from behind, causing him to jump nearly five feet in the air. Turning around, he was both relieved and annoyed to see Alex chuckling at his back, his face red from laughing.

"What was that for?"

"Oh, you were just looking so ghostly," the bass player explained mockingly. "Figured I'd scare some of the pink back into your face."

Graham scowled, giving Alex the dirtiest look he could manage.

"Oh come on, Gra. Be a sport," he taunted, hitting him in the shoulder playfully. "You're never fun anymore."

"I'm not in the mood to be 'fun'," Graham replied, the last word sticking on his tongue like dry sandpaper. He looked up to see the store clerk giving the both of them a bit of a funny look, and cursed Alex for being so obvious. Thankfully, Alex seemed to acknowledge the visual cue, letting go of Graham's shoulders.

Unconsciously, Graham's eyes immediately flicked back up toward the window, to where Damon was still standing, as if to make sure he was still there. Just in case.

"All right, all right I'll leave you be. Humbug." He felt the bass player pat him on the back before leaning in toward his ear. "Word of advice, though, Gra?"

"What?" Graham mumbled, sounding more annoyed than usual.

"Staring's only okay when they haven't got a girlfriend."

Graham shot Alex another equally venomous look, prompting the

bassist to chuckle as he walked away, a wide bastard grin on his face. He knew Alex was joking, of course, but it still bothered him to hear it out loud, and even then, while they were in public. Sometimes Graham wondered if Alex was more privvy to he and Damon's private activities than either of them were aware of. Sometimes it almost seemed as though Alex was making a pointed effort to discourage him.

Shrugging the thought of Alex out his mind, he walked outside. From across the way, he could hear the faint strains of Damon's voice talking into the receiver. The singer's eyes flicked upward as soon as he heard the jingle of the door, taking a brief and seemingly self-conscious note of Graham's presence before breaking eye contact once again.

"No, every thing's fine. Just forget I said it."

Graham cupped his hands to his mouth, lighting one of his newly-bought cigarettes and taking a long inhale. He tried desperately to push Damon and his conversation to the back of his mind, chewed on his fingernails for a brief nervous moment (a habit Damon hated), and took another drag.

Sometimes, he thought, it felt like they'd been on tour for ages. Though technically, they'd only been in America for little over a month now, each day seemed to get worse as the tour went on, for explicable (their continual failure to captivate any American audience they were put in front of) and inexplicable (the half-serious fist fights between Graham and Alex over no particular matter) reasons.

It was like being in Hell. The tour was Hell. America, in general, was Hell. As far as they were aware, their American record label, SBK, didn't give a shit about them, except for the fact that they were a signed band that weren't selling tickets. That, and that Blur were, like many of their contemporaries back home, a band that could make it in Europe but not in America and therefore, were a somewhat hopeless band.

"It's just a few more weeks. Don't worry." He heard Damon say into the receiver, his voice louder now.

Graham sat down on the bench between the door and Damon, the cigarette he held between his thin fingers making a filter of smoke across his expressionless face.

"Look, I've got to go. I'll call you in a couple days, alright?"

The door jingled again, and Graham watched as Alex walked past him, giving him a suspicious "what-are-you-doing-out-here" sort of look before making a bee-line for the bus.

"I love you too. Bye."

Graham rolled his eyes, letting out a long exhale of smoke as he did so, his fingers trembling. He watched Damon walk towards him, his body slouching, his face completely blank. He avoided eye contact, looking instead at Alex walking toward the bus, then at his own feet, then at Alex again.

"So did you tell her?"

There was long pause, and Graham heard Damon exhale loudly, as though he had been holding his breath the entire time.

"What do you think?"

Graham paused, taking a long drag on his cigarette instead of responding immediately.

"I think you're scared."

"I'm not."

Unfolding his arms, the guitarist dropped his cigarette on the ground, snubbing the rest of it out with the tip of his shoe. He turned to look at Damon for the first time, his eyes tense.

"You're a coward, Damon. You're a coward for not telling her."

Graham stared at the singer for a moment, his eyes burning holes into him, before turning and heading toward the bus. He couldn't see him, but he hew knew Damon was still standing there, his hands stuck in his jeans pockets like a sore puppy.

When he'd looked at Damon, he had hardly looked apologetic. Sure he had looked a little sad maybe, but that was it. And it took the piss out of Graham. Of course of it did. Damon had looked straight through him, as though he'd just been slapped, like a poor animal who'd just

been kicked for no particular reason that they understood, and it made Graham resent him even more.

Of course he had to hate him. He'd promised. Damon had promised he'd tell her, and he hadn't, not this time and not any of the other times. The thing that got to got to him though, was that Graham knew somehow, in a very small, dark corner of his mind, that Damon probably never would tell her, and that was what bothered him. That was, in fact, what was killing him more than anything.

They'd been fucking for months now. Justine didn't know. Of course she didn't know. Damon didn't want to tell her. He didn't want to admit to himself what was happening. That what they really were doing was cheating, even if it was with best friend and not another woman.

As with most instances between them, it started out innocently enough. A small touch on the shoulder, a peck on the cheek, the awkward shuffles their bodies made as their paths collided on the small tour bus. Moments when, Graham would reach over to grab something from the overhead storage and he would, momentarily, catch Damon looking at him from the seat below, his eyes a curious blue as watched Graham's shirt rise up and over his trousers, exposing his pale, skinny hips and stomach for only a few brief seconds before disappearing again.

Moments when, for instance, Damon would ask to borrow something, a shirt maybe, and Graham would obligingly hand him one, only to minutes later, politely pretend he was too busy doing something else to notice Damon changing in front of him. They did these sort of things for weeks, each one more obvious than the next, as though having created some maddeningly bizarre game of cat and mouse out of the sexual tension they refused to acknowledge despite themselves.

That was, until one night, in Glasgow, when he'd woken up to Damon kissing him. Up until that point, Graham had been sleeping on the singer's shoulder, his head tucked in somewhat awkwardly between the side of the seat and the singer's arm. Normally, Damon would have woke Graham up and told him to bugger off per usual, that he'd have to move his arse over a couple of seats over so that he didn't make his arm fall asleep while he was reading his book. Yet for some reason, this time he'd let Graham fall asleep on him anyway, and hadn't said anything, as though pushing him off this time was too much effort.

He remembered waking up to the sound of rain pounding against the windows, the blue twilight of the countryside filtering through the foggy window beside them. For a moment he'd wondered if he was still dreaming, until looked up to see Damon's wide and scared and anxious eyes looking back at him, coyishly enough to suggest that he wasn't quite sure of what he'd just done. Graham stared back at the singer, unblinkingly, the feeling of Damon's lips still warm on his mouth.

Their faces still hovering just inches away from one another, Damon moved to kiss him again, more forcefully this time, his dry, thin lips connecting with Graham's sweetly, hesitantly, girlishly.

Graham wanted to pinch himself, to wake himself up, to make sure he wasn't dreaming this time around, that this was actually happening, that Damon was actually kissing him and wanting this, wanting him, Graham Coxon, his best mate in the whole wide world and, up until that point, romantically implausible.

Graham remembered the sound of rain pounding against the window as they kissed, the landscape outside obscured by the fogginess of the bus window, their foreheads pressed together like endearing teenage lovers and their breath white, the darkness and the rain and sound of everyone else sleeping keeping them from being discovered.

After that, they didn't need to say much to one another. The last few years of sexual awkwardness, of quiet uncertainty, seem to dissipate after that one night, and for one reason or another, they no longer had to explain anything.

Before long, they became experts at conjuring up excuses to take long breaks before and after shows, pressing up against one another in dark motel rooms, their mouths tied to one another's, their need for one another desperate, pushing, all-encompassing.

Sometimes, it seemed, it was only thing that kept them going. The stress and tension of the tour's failure seemed to manifest itself in the form of their pent-up sexual frustration. It seemed to Graham almost as if all the tension, all of the unspoken words between them the night Damon had seen him with Jamie had been forgotten, forgiven maybe, and now they could finally admit to one another that this was what they had always wanted but were too afraid to admit to.

And it was amazing, Graham thought, everything about them, about

being together, about finally admitting to themselves that even though what they were doing was wrong for a number of valid reasons, it was still okay. Even if it was only okay in their heads, somewhat.

Except for one thing. One glaringly obvious thing that kept Graham from losing himself entirely in the moment every time they were together.

The moments he felt Damon's hands move slyly underneath the hem of his t-shirt to touch pale skin, to attend to, with his mouth and his hands, the plethora of sensitive areas between his collarbone and his lower stomach. The moments Damon's tongue and teeth did things to Graham he'd never felt before. The moments Damon leaned down and whispered sweet, wonderful promises in his ear, holding him tightly after they both came, shivering and trembling in the dark of a motel room.

Every moment, something, someone, was tugging at the small sinnows of his subconscious.

When was Damon going to tell her?

Graham felt a pang of anger surge through him as the bat connected with the third window, his eyes stinging as he watched the safety glass crumble underneath his fingers. The pain of glass between his fingers brought him back to reality, the sharp points digging into his skin as he gripped the bat tighter.

"What in the bloody hell do you think you're doing?"

Graham turned around to see the familiar sillohuette of their bass player glaring back at him. He frowned.

"Fuck off."

"Give me the bat, Graham."

"No."

"Give me the bat, Gra. I'm not going to ask again."

"Fuck off, you fucking sod. I hate you."

Alex lunged toward him, his hand reaching for the bat, but Graham

quickly moved away, swinging instead at the bass player's head. He missed, Alex dodging his blow just barely and giving the bass player enough time to grab Graham by the wrist roughly, causing him to drop the bat. Seconds later, he felt Alex's fist in his face, a good hard blow to the side of his head, and the world turned black.

By the time he regained consciousness, he was on the ground, a slice of pain tearing through his cheek where it had connected with the small jagged rocks on the ground. Tenatively, he touched his hand to the side of his face, feeling his own warm sticky blood as it began to surface.

He looked up to see the tall, lanky figure of Alex, stupid fucking fringe and all, glaring down at him menacingly. He held his hand out to Graham, motioning for him to get up. Beside him stood Ifan, their tour manager, heaving as though he'd just finished doing some heavy lifting. They both looked angry, and Graham was pretty sure he knew why.

"Come on."

Graham took the bass player's hand, wiping the blood off his face with the back of his of his other hand. Standing on his feet, he lunged at Alex once again, for reasons none other than, in his drunken state, he felt like it. His fist connected with the side of the bassist's face, causing him a bit of shock before he retaliated, Alex's much more graceful (and angry) fist connecting with Graham's nose.

"Ahh! What the fuck!" Graham cried, his hands covering his nose protectively.

"Oh, shut up already." He looked up to see Alex rubbing his chin gingerly. "Try that one more time and I'll make bloody well sure you don't wake up that quickly again."

"Ew didden haff to break my noeef." Graham retorted, his voice muffled as he glared back angrily from behind his hands, the fresh blood from his nose trailing down his face and into his mouth.

"Well, you'd fucking deserve it if I did, wouldn't you?"

"Jesus, Alex, get him a napkin or something so he doesn't bleed everywhere." Graham heard the tour manager say from somewhere above him. A few seconds later he felt Alex begrudgingly shoving a

paper napkin into his face.

"He's been drinking again. I can smell it on his breath."

"I know." Alex said, with disdain in voice, as though the revelation were nothing new.

Graham glared from behind his bloody napkin, resenting the both of them. He felt Ifan let go of his shoulders, sighing.

"Ifan, you should go to bed. You need the sleep. Don't worry, I'll deal with babysitting him tonight." He heard Alex say to their manager, loud enough that Graham could hear.

"Gee, thanks." Graham muttered loudly, spitting blood onto the floor of the bus. He heard Ifan shuffle off, patting Alex on the back and wishing him luck.

He watched as the bass player narrowed his eyes at him, looking more tired and frustrated than anything else. To be honest, Alex looked anything but his usual chirpy self. The dark circles underneath his eyes betrayed his normal sense of composure, and he looked as though he hadn't been sleeping well the past few nights. Then again, none of them had been sleeping very well.

"Christ. You're like a little kid, Graham, really." He heard Alex say, his words cutting through the silence between them.

Graham looked up at him through his fingers, glaring.

"Do you even realize what the label's going to do to us when they see this?" Alex continued, the harshness of his voice making Graham flinch.

"You do realize they're on the verge of dropping us?" He asked, as though assuming Graham might be incredibly daft after all.

Of course Graham knew SBK were on the verge of dropping them. They were horrible. Everyone hated them. No one would come to their shows, and up until this point, they had proven themselves to be nothing more than a waste of goodwill and credit as far as the label was concerned.

Alex sighed defeatedly, and Graham watched as bits of dark black hair

fell over the bassist's pale forehead, obscuring his expression. He shook his head.

"I promised Ifan I'd babysit you tonight, because you obviously can't be trusted on your own without causing some sort of destruction." Alex repeated, as though Graham hadn't heard him earlier.

He held out his hand to the guitarist, motioning. "Now you can either follow me back to my room like a proper drunk, or you can get socked in the nose again. Your choice."

Graham stared at the bassist for a moment, a mild look of distrust in his eyes as he did so. Alex was being nice, well...kinder than usual, at least. It was strange. Graham couldn't tell if Alex felt sorry for him, or if this was just his normal way of dealing with rowdy drunks in the middle of the night. Truth be told, he didn't know why Alex didn't just sock him in the nose again and let him pass out in the front seats of the bus. It would have been easier in the long run.

After a few seconds of contemplation, he took Alex's hand, his desire to avoid getting hit in the face again overwhelming his urge to try another violent move with Alex. It was the bassist's turn for the bus' private bed tonight, which was, essentially more of a closed off space rather than a room, but a room nonetheless. It consisted of a single, barely large enough twin poster bed attached to the back of the bus with single door and only one window. It wasn't much, and the quarters were cramped, but in comparison to the shared bunk beds they usually slept in, with only curtains and nothing else for privacy, sleeping in the cabin was something of a luxury.

Graham wasn't sure how Alex expected the both of them to fit in the twin bed together, but he chose not to ask, as though saying anything more might aggravate the bassist further. Alex gave him a mild look of contempt as he opened the door to the room, plopping down on the bed and reaching back to open the window a crack.

Looking at him now in the light, Graham thought Alex looked even more tired than he had outside, the large dark circles under his eyes looking even more prominent. He still managed to look handsome, though, even with a ghostly pale complexion and dark eyes, and Graham couldn't help but resent him for it.

He watched as Alex pulled a thin pack of cigarettes out of his pocket, his long, thin fingers putting the stick to his mouth and lighting it

with the speed and agility of a true addict. To Graham's dismay, he neglected to share, taking his first drag and stuffing the pack back into his pants pocket without a word.

"Am I sleeping here?" Graham asked, his voice low.

"No. You're sleeping there." Alex pointed to the floor. He flicked his cigarette to the side, his other hand pushing a pillow and blanket toward Graham and motioning toward the floor.

"Christ." Graham muttered underneath his breath, loudly enough so that Alex could hear. Shivering, he placed the blanket and pillow down on the floor. Laying sideways, he made a point to turn away from Alex, pretending to fall asleep as the bassist finished his cigarette and turned off the lamp. After a few minutes of laying quiet in the darkness, he heard Alex take a deep breath.

"So, do you want to tell me what's wrong?"

"With what?"

"Don't be a tosser. I saw what happened earlier with Damon."

Graham didn't respond immediately, shuffling underneath his sheets for a moment. "It's none of your business."

There was a tense silence between them for a moment, as though Alex were trying to choose his next words carefully.

"Come up here."

"What?"

"You heard me."

Graham hesitated for a moment, peering up into the dark space where Alex was laying. He shivered. It was cold on the floor, unbearably so. Taking a deep breath, he quickly untangled himself from his blanket and moved to the bed, giving Alex a bit of a sideways glance as he did so.

"Thanks," he muttered, turning his body away from Alex so that their closeness wasn't quite so awkward. He pulled the sheets closer to his chin, his body shivering.

"Gra?"

"Yeah?"

"Is Damon...is he...you know....?"

Graham bit his lip, waiting for Alex to finish. "Is he what?"

"Is he, you know, making you...?"

Graham squeezed his eyes shut, blushing in the darkness. "Christ, Alex. No. Damon's not taking advantage of me, okay? You're really making this weird now, so just...drop it, all right?"

"Alright. I'm just worried about my mate, is all."

He felt Alex shift on the bed, turning over to lay on his side so that his body faced Graham's. There was a moment of silence before either of them spoke again.

"Why do you care so much anyway?"

"You mean other than the breaking windows part?" He heard Alex sigh behind him, chuckling a bit. "You really want to know?"

"Yeah."

"Maybe because I fancy you a little bit."

"Now you're just pulling my leg. Making me feel worse."

"No. I'm not."

Graham swallowed, feeling slightly more awkward than he had before, the thought of Alex's proximity to his body consuming him.

"Oh?"

"I know you think I'm mad for saying it. But you would have figured it out sooner or later." He felt Alex move behind him, his legs brushing momentarily against Graham's as he shifted underneath the sheets. "Perhaps I'm a bit jealous, I suppose."

Jealous? Alex James jealous? Graham felt himself blush even harder, his mouth opening to speak but then closing once again, as though he were unsure of what to say. It made perfect sense now, though. All of the comments, all of the childish teasing whenever Alex caught Graham looking at Damon. It wasn't Alex being cheeky for the sake of being cheeky, he had an agenda, and for some unfathomable reason, Graham had conveniently neglected to notice any of this until now.

"Is he going to break up with her?"

"Who?"

"Justine."

"Oh." Graham shifted a bit, pulling the sheets closer to his body. "I don't know."

"Is that why you're angry? You think he's using you?"

Graham took a deep breath. "BLOODY HELL, ALEX. If I'd known it'd be this hard to sleep with you, I would have stayed in the front of the bus."

"Sorry." He heard the bassist mutter from behind him.

They laid together in silence for a few minutes, only the sound of Alex breathing indicating that there was anyone alive in the room.

"...Did you really mean that?" Graham asked, finally breaking the silence.

"Did I really mean what?"

"That you fancied me."

"Bloody hell, Gra..." Graham heard the bassist let out a long sigh. "You really are completely oblivious, aren't you?"

Graham chewed on his lower lip, staring out into the darkness for a moment. "Do you think he'll leave her? For me, I mean."

"Honestly?" He felt Alex's head lift off the pillow, as though he were looking down at him. "No."

Graham felt his insides sink inside him, his eyes stinging in the darkness. He tried his best to keep quiet, but his shallow breathing gave him away, and before he knew it, he felt Alex's hand on his shoulders again, rubbing them.

"You know Gra," Alex began, the warmth of his hands beginning to loosen the guitarist's tense body. "You're a pretty nice bloke. Well, other than the breaking windows. All things being said, there's plenty of people out there that would adore you."

Graham turned his body toward the bassist, but not before rubbing his face with his dirty hands and feeling incredibly childish for doing so. He peered at Alex through the darkness, their eyes meeting.

"You know what I mean?" Alex continued, still looking at Graham despite the darkness. "There's some people out there that would treat you better. Cherish you. Wouldn't take you for granted."

He could still feel Alex's warm hand on his neck, his soft fingertips as he barely traced the guitarist's cheek with his thumb, an intimate motion too quick and self-conscious to be taken as just an accident.

Graham stopped breathing, his eyes lingering on the soft outline of the bassist in the darkness, as though waiting for him to do anything, say something, to break the palpable closeness between them, but nothing came. He felt Alex's hand withdraw for a moment, and a small part of him, a very small hopeless part of Graham that had only existed until a few minutes ago, died inside of him. He closed his eyes.

"Can I ask you something, Alex?"

"Shoot."

"Are you my friend...or are you something else?"

There was a silence in the darkness, for a moment, and then Alex's voice.

"I'm whatever you want me to be, Gra."

The guitarist took a deep breath, each beat of his heart feeling more pronounced than the next. He felt Alex's warm body slide up next to him, and the temptation to reach out and touch him was unbearable.

Thankfully, however, the part of him that was still conscious was still drunk enough, however, to make that final, teetering decision to kiss Alex. And so he did.

It probably could have been more romantic on Graham's part. But one could blame that on the alcohol, really, and he was fairly certain even Alex wouldn't hold that against him. Their first kiss was dry, chapped lips pressed one another's in the cold dark, their bodies sharing a collective pool of body heat beneath the sheets.

Alex seemed, initially, a bit surprised, and Graham couldn't blame him. He'd probably never have kissed Alex sober, he would have been too self-conscious. His mouth moved against Graham's, a bit robotic at first, but eventually loosening up, his hand moving to cradle Graham's cheek in an attempt to make up for the first few unromantic moments perhaps.

It wasn't long before he felt Alex's insistent tongue pausing at the crevice between his lips, softly biting down on Graham's lower lip.

It didn't take much convincing, and the guitarist opened his mouth willingly, allowing Alex to slip his tongue between his lips with the sort of agility that made Graham wonder whether Alex had been practicing this whole move in his head for months before, just for this exact moment.

A brief moan escaped the guitarist as the bassist pressed their bodies together. Alex was a better kisser than Damon (a much more romantic kisser in that he was much more attentive to certain things), though this didn't surprise Graham whatsoever. Damon was muddied and forward and aggressive where Alex was precise, and slow, and tender; each turn and movement and soft clench of teeth at his lip feeling calculated and thought out instead of mindlessly aggressive. It was almost sweet in a way, the way Alex kissed him, as though he were some fragile object that he had to be careful with, lest he crumble underneath him. Damon always kissed Graham like didn't know what he wanted. Alex kissed Graham like he knew exactly what he wanted.

Without another word, he felt Alex's hands slipping underneath his t-shirt, warm hands moving to touch the pale white skin of his chest, the smooth flat muscles of his stomach. Graham felt himself pull away momentarily, propping himself up on his knees and removing Alex's shirt along with his own. Within moments, he felt the bass player's hands move to the buttons of his jeans, his erection now

embarrassingly obvious to the both of them, and suddenly he realized, with extreme guilt, that he knew exactly what he wanted to happen with Alex.

"Are you all right?" Alex asked, his hands stopping momentarily. His bright eyes shined up at the guitarist, his pale face barely visible, but still incredibly handsome in the darkness.

Graham smiled and nodded silently, saying nothing but pressing his lips to Alex's once again, his head spinning with thoughts of guilt and revenge and terrible things and the thought of Alex's hands touching him, feeling him, with the type of softness and delicacy that he knew Damon would never have with him.

As if of their own accord, their hands began to move over one another's bodies. He felt Alex's hands trace over his stomach, stroking warm skin; shoulders, sides, back, arse, and finally, finally attending to the fabric-covered area in-between his thighs; callused, yet soft fingertips procuring small, breathy moans from the guitarist as he did so.

Alex, in turn, moaned as he felt Graham's hands move downward, slipping down the back of bassist's pants and cupping his arse, pulling Alex into him. Before long, Alex moved his hand and they both began to grind against one another, both of them gasping at the exquisite, yet almost painful feeling of being so close together.

He quivered as he felt Alex retract, his lips leaving Graham's to travel down his neck, licking and sucking, his mouth leaving small rosy patches on the landscape neck and collarbone. Graham laid his head back against the headboard, his breath shallow as felt Alex's hand slip underneath his briefs, wrapping itself around his erection. Graham felt himself thrust forward involuntarily, into Alex's grasp, mewling slightly as the bassist began to stroke him.

Graham let out a frustrated whimper as he felt Alex stop, his breathing heavy as he moved in to kiss Graham once again, the guitarist's mouth willingly opening underneath his own.

"Don't stop. Please."

He heard the bassist chuckle above him, as though the thought of having Graham begging him to touch him was still something he wasn't quite used to hearing.

"Oh, don't worry."

Graham couldn't see Alex's face in the darkness, not well at least, yet he still knew the smug bastard had a smile on his face, and an agenda at that, and for the second time that night, Graham felt himself becoming very anxious.

Alex's hands pressed down on the guitarist, shifting him so that his body was completely flat against the bed before taking care to remove Graham's trousers completely, causing the guitarist to shudder at his exposure to the sudden coldness. Nervously, impatiently, he bit his lip, on the verge of asking Alex what he was doing before suddenly feeling cold air replaced by a silky warm, all encompassing wetness.

Graham threaded his fingers into Alex's hair, doing his best to stifle his moans (he wouldn't want anyone to hear them now...or would he?) as the bassist's mouth worked itself over the tip of his cock and then moved downward, each swirl of the tongue eliciting an involuntary thrust from the guitarist's hips.

It was hard not to make noise at this point, and for a moment, he wondered if Damon could hear them, if he knew what he and Alex were doing, if he knew how amazing Alex's mouth was, or how good it felt for Graham to have another body underneath his hands.

"Fuck, Alex...where'd you learn to do this?"

He felt Alex's mouth vibrate beneath him, as though he were laughing, and he shivered at the sensation.

"Loads of practice." He heard the bass player mutter, obviously smiling, before diving back again, his mouth taking care to swallow Graham tantalizingly, maddeningly slowly once again until he felt the back of Alex's throat, a trick which, up until this point, Graham had not been privvy to with Damon or anyone else.

This time, Graham let out a long, almost purring moan, his hands holding Alex's head in place as he resumed, his talented, and very precise tongue threatening to drive Graham out of his mind. He watched as Alex's hand moved to his own cock, building up a rhythm that they both were comfortable at, each thrust of Graham's hips causing Alex's mouth to hum around him, and to quicken the pace between them.

It wasn't long before Graham felt his body give way, grabbing, holding, crying out expletives and Alex's name as he came, a long and intense stretch pleasure washing over him. Alex came not shortly after, his breath heavy as he held onto Graham, shaking, his whole body collapsing in exhaustion next to him.

After a few minutes of catching their breath, he felt Alex's arms wrap around his waist, both of their bodies still trembling in the afterglow. Alex laid his head on Graham's chest, and almost instinctively or out of habit, Graham laid his arm across him, his left arm resting on the curve of Alex's stomach almost protectively.

It took them a few minutes to regain their senses, for the both of them to stop shaking, to realize what they'd done, what Graham had done, and not to mention what Damon had, most likely, heard from the other side of the wall. A sudden rush of pain and fear and guilt rushed over Graham, something so intense and emotional that it felt almost quite like childish guilt, and he felt his heart sink. Up until this point he'd felt as though he'd been wrapped in some semblance of composure, some vague image of a guilty Damon deserving not only to hear, but to see all of what he'd done with Alex.

And suddenly it hit him, the visual of Damon's face, the mock-sadness on his face as Graham called him a coward, and a worthless, hurtful human being among other things....and finally he understood, in a sad and un-redeeming way why Damon couldn't tell Justine about the both of them. Why he couldn't tell her over the phone, let alone at all.

It would hurt to see Damon's face in the morning, of this he was sure. That was, if he had the courage to look at him at all.

He tried his best to hide it, but when his eyes stung, and his breathing gave him away once again, he felt Alex's arms hold him tighter and somehow instead of making him feel better, it seemed to only make him feel worse.

Chapter 5

Graham liked Jane for a lot of reasons. She had a lot of qualities going for her: pretty face, nice body, nice smile, well-read, mildly political (when it came to feminism), and she didn't take herself or Graham too seriously. Her greatest God-given talented however, and perhaps Graham's favorite, was her curious, yet rather useful ability to completely and utterly annoy the hell out of Damon Albarn.

They had been in the middle of a session when she had come round to check out the studio. Graham had invited her of course, but he'd mindfully kept that information privvy to himself and Alex only, so that when they came back into the room, holding hands gingerly, he noted Damon out of the corner of his eye--red-faced and silently furious, hunched over the piano, giving Graham the look of death.

Of course Jane knew what Damon thought of her from the beginning. It was hard not to notice. Damon's obvious lack of interest, the broken eye contact, and the rather cold, uninviting handshake he gave her when Graham introduced them. It wasn't that Damon was completely unsupportive of Graham's other romantic endeavors, it was more or less that he chose not to acknowledge that they existed. Much like, he thought, how he and Graham conveniently forgot from time to time about Damon's long-term relationship with the woman he'd been living with for the last four years.

The funny thing about Jane, however, is that she seemed to find the whole situation hilarious. The cold handshakes, the brief acknowledgement; she took Damon's distaste for her and consciously took it one step further, attempting to make her presence in front of the singer as excruciating as possible.

She doted on Graham a lot, first of all, which obviously pissed Damon off. The cutesy hugs, the holding hands, the short, but intimate open-mouthed kisses she made an effort to give only when she knew Damon was looking. Graham couldn't tell if she did what she did because she felt like Damon was some sort of competition for her, or because she just hated him. Either way, Graham liked her. A lot.

Today, however, felt particularly tense. And you could tell, from the look on Damon's face, how much he hated her being there, how, with great self-restraint, he was biting down on his tongue for the rest of them in light of her appearance in the studio--a huge taboo as far as

the rest of the band and the label were concerned.

Girlfriends were not allowed in the studio, period, the end. Justine didn't even sit in on their sessions, Damon wouldn't let her. Graham knew damn well what the rules were, but the opportunity to piss off Damon, especially in the studio, his most brooding and dictatorial state, was far too good for Graham to pass up.

"Hi Alex. Hi Dave." Jane smiled at the other two band members as she walked in, letting go of Graham's hand and flopping down on the couch across from the piano.

"Hi Damon."

Graham watched Damon, hunched over the piano like a frustrated cave-man, his jaw clenching and unclenching at the mention of his name. They both heard the singer mutter something underneath his breath, a short hollow "hello" of sorts that sounded incredibly forced. You could've cut the atmospheric tension with a knife if you'd wanted to.

"Sorry for interrupting, guys. I told Graham I was interested in hearing you guys practice in the studio. See the whole...wossit called, creative process? You know, see the real *creative genius* in action." She looked at Damon, smiling as she emphasized the last few words.

Graham tried his best force back a smile, turning away from the rest of them as if to re-tune his guitar. NME had recently called Damon a "creative genius" in one of their articles about the band, and Damon had let the term go to his head a bit, which of course had rubbed Graham the wrong way per usual, especially now that NME liked to pretend that all of Blur's songs were written by Damon exclusively.

There was another tense silence in the room after she said this, Damon still brooding over his piano.

"Well, then. I'm glad that Graham took the liberty of inviting you to participate, as we've already wasted enough time today." Damon looked up from the keys at Graham, his lips pursed and his eyes shooting knives in the guitarist's direction.

"What Damon is trying to say, Jane, is that you're not a bother because we enjoy your company." Alex piped up brightly, smiling from the other side of the room and giving Graham a quick, friendly, reassuring

glance.

Graham smiled back, a hesitant, *yes-I'm-quite-aware-of-what-I'm doing-and-what-rules-I'm-breaking-thanks-Alex* sort of smile.

"Aww, thank you, Alex. You're so very sweet." Jane responded, looking backwards at Alex from over the back of the couch. She shot Graham a mischievous look and threw him a thumbs up sign.

"Alright, we'll start from the top then?" Damon interceded.

**

Band practice went fairly quickly, to Graham's relief. And despite the presence of Jane, Damon, for the most part, seemed to hold his tongue. In fact, it wasn't until Jane had said her goodbyes to Graham and left that Damon finally cornered him.

He was in the middle of putting his guitar back in it's case when he spotted Damon walking up to him, his body language rigid.

"You were out of line today, doing that, you know."

"Doing what?"

"For bringing Jane in here. Without asking me."

"Oh sorry, mum. Didn't know I had to have your permission." Graham responded defensively, turning off the stomp box at his feet.

"Don't be a prick."

Graham frowned, looking up at Damon with the sort of look that an impatient child would give their mum. He had had little patience left for Damon's tantrums lately, and at the moment, even less so.

"Look, I'm sorry, alright?" He closed the remaining clasps on the guitar case closed with a loud, rather unsettling snap. He looked up to see Damon still glaring at him, as though still waiting for a more acceptable explanation.

"I was just trying to be nice. She wanted to see what I do, what the band does."

"Well, it's not a bloody tourist stop, Gra," Damon began, his lips pursed. "No matter how you seem to treat it lately."

"See? You hate her. It's obvious. You're jealous. That's exactly it."

"It's a studio, Graham, not a motel room."

"Ha!" The guitarist laughed, shaking his head and reaching down to pick up the guitar case. "And you, of all people, would certainly know about motel rooms, wouldn't you?"

A look of pain passed across Damon's face, quickly followed by a look of bitter resentment. "And what's that supposed to mean exactly?"

"You know what it means." Graham responded, still avoiding eye contact with the singer. He walked back across the studio, setting the guitar case on the couch, and began to rummage through his bag. The sooner he could leave and get away from Damon, the better, he thought.

He watched as the singer moved to open his mouth but stopped, as though taking a moment to reconsider what he'd just heard.

"...Is that really what you think all this is about?"

Graham said nothing, instead looking down and staring solidly into his equipment bag. He could feel Damon's eyes burning holes into the back of his head.

"All this equipment, and space, and money, and instruments--you think this is for playing around?" The singer began. Damon was starting off on yet another one of his tangents, per usual, Graham thought bitterly.

"I've got record executives on my arse every day telling me to make another 'Parklife' when we haven't got one."

"Christ, Damon. You think I don't know that?"

"Oh, but where are you? Where have you been, Gra?"

The guitarist said nothing, a choking anger beginning to rise up in his throat. He bit his tongue, hard. He knew exactly what Damon was going to say next.

"No? Well, I'll tell you where you've been, Gra." Damon began, his sharp voice sounding even more cutting than usual. "Off getting piss drunk in shoddy bar somewhere, that's where you've been. Letting the rest of us pick up the slack for you, to do your part of the record, that's what."

"As if this record was mine to make in the first place!" Graham retorted, his voice reaching a much higher pitch than he would have liked.

"After all, there's no band behind creative genius Damon Albarn as far as everyone else is concerned, is there? All you need to do is reach up your own arse and pull out a song, don't you?"

The singer gave him a solemn, tired look. It was a look that suggested they'd had this argument may times before. His eyes were bloodshot, a fairly clear indication that he hadn't been sleeping for the past few days. His usual disposition was completely off, and Graham could tell that his friend was not having the best of days.

"For the last time Gra, It isn't just "my band". I keep telling you that, but you don't believe me."

"Easy for you to say."

"Well."

There was another moment of silence before the guitarist looked down at his feet, his head shaking. "You're ridiculous, Day. You're a deluded man."

"Oh, now I'm deluded, am I?" The singer laughed incredulously, sitting down on the couch behind him. "Pray tell me, how am I 'deluded'?"

"You're deluded into thinking you've got it all right. The media, the press, the albums, the songs. You think you've got everyone by the ear, but you haven't got me right at all."

The singer looked up at him tiredly, the base of his hand pressed against his forehead as though he were trying to alleviate some sort of aching pain. He gave Graham the sort of look an irritated mother would give her child when he'd said something ridiculous.

"Is that what you think, Gra? That I've gotten you all wrong?" He sighed. "Is that is why you continually refuse to come to band practice, on time, or at all? Why you neglect to return my phone calls, or give a general shit about this band?"

The guitarist stood silent, his mind fuming.

"It's because I've hurt your feelings, have I? I've gotten you *'all wrong'*, as you put it." Damon reiterated, his voice dripping with contempt.

There was pause, and then their eyes connected.

"Have I got that all right?" He waved his hand in the air, as though he were referring to the abstractedness of Graham's thoughts.

"No." Graham swallowed slowly, trying his best to contain his rage, to not just call Damon a heartless cunt and run out of the room, away from him, away from his stinging words and his discerning looks.

"I don't give a shit about this band, *your band* Damon, because you don't give a shit about any of the people in it."

A look of realization slowly crept over Damon's tired face. "Oh, so that's what this is all about."

"What's what all about?"

"It always comes down to Justine, after all."

"I didn't say that."

"You meant it."

Graham bit down on his lip, so hard he almost drew blood. "When are you going to stop acting like a child? Like everyone around you is simply designed to revolve around you, for your own pleasure?"

"Those are pretty big words coming from someone who regularly participates in weekly pity fucks with Alex James."

Graham stood silent for a moment. He could feel the blood rushing to his face, his cheeks stinging angrily. He hadn't been aware that Damon had known about him and Alex.

"Well," Graham began. "At least it's better than a pity fuck with you, isn't it? At least I'm not disgusted when he touches me."

He reached across the singer to grab his bag from the couch, his arm brushing past Damon's as he did so. He could see Damon out of the corner of his eye, and for once, it seemed as though whatever Graham had just said had actually gotten through to him. You could see the sudden look of pain on his face, as though Graham had stuck the dagger into his soft spot and twisted it just the right amount.

Graham lifted the bag off the couch, his eyes avoiding the singer's at all costs. He was capable enough of insulting Damon, but it took another courage entirely to look at him while he did so.

Moving to leave, he felt Damon grab him by the arm, firmly.

"You don't mean that."

Graham looked down at Damon nervously, their faces merely inches apart from one another's. He quickly noted the redness in the singer's eyes, the brief flickr of desperation and sadness that resided there, if only temporarily.

Graham swallowed slowly, feeling a tinge of regret suddenly seep into his conscious rage. Maybe he shouldn't have said that, after all. Perhaps it had been too much.

"Let me go."

"Tell me you don't mean that, Gra."

"You're hurting me. Let me go."

Slowly, hesitantly, he felt Damon's grip began to loosen, and Graham took a few steps back.

"Don't be like this, please."

"Don't be like what?" Graham asked, irritated.

"Don't run out on me and not say another thing to me for a week, Gra. Please. I know that's what you're going to do." Damon began, soft indications of defeat beginning to filter through his voice.

Graham was used to this voice. It was the voice Damon always used to coax him into doing things he didn't want to do, to pull him out of bed, out of a corner, out of his solidarity.

He was looking at his feet when he felt Damon's warm hand, his thumb gently stroking his cheek. It was a calming method, Graham knew, a sly trick utilized at just the right moment to pacify him into submission, and he resented Damon for doing it. It reminded him of all the times the singer had used it to coax him into his bed, to reassure him that everything they were doing was perfectly normal.

He sighed, dropping his bag to the ground defeatedly. He didn't want to fight Damon anymore. He was tired, exhausted just by the thought of yelling any more, or risk being any more sore from Damon's malign, and unrelenting judgement of his character. He always had something to say, some instance in which to call Graham irresponsible, a child, an alcoholic, or some other bereavement to impress upon him. He cast his eyes downward the entire time, and after a moment, he felt Damon's hand beneath his chin, raising it up.

"Will you at least look at me, please?"

Graham paused, brown eyes flickering up, somewhat resentfully, to meet blue.

"I'm sorry I yelled at you." The singer whispered softly, his fingers deftly stroking the hair over Graham's ears.

"You're always sorry."

"Well, I really mean it this time." He felt the singer wrap his arms around him, hugging him tightly.

"I don't want you to leave, alright?"

Graham closed his eyes, feeling a hollow sting in his chest as his band mate embraced him. He could feel Damon's breath against his ear, the sweet warmness of their bodies pressed together, but for some reason it still felt cold, unconvincing. His heart wasn't with it.

Sometimes it bothered Graham that Damon tried to pretend like everything was okay. As though a touch, a kiss on the cheek, a few sweet words would somehow magically wisk away all the contention between them. When it came down to it, as friends, as anything more

than mere band mates they were like a car crash; all bits of crunched up nothingness that once seemed to resemble something, something that had at one time seemed worth paying attention to perhaps, but was now terribly disfigured.

Whatever they'd had, as young boys, as best friends, had somehow been swept away in the course of things, in the last year, in the last three years. And it felt, to Graham anyway, that there wasn't much of a point trying to glue it all back together.

Assess the damages, salvage the remainder, move on.

The first move wasn't surprising at all, he had expected it. Damon's mouth against his own, pushing the back of his knees against the cushions of the couch. He felt a pang of familiarity, of sadness, and burgeoning sexual want all at the same time. It reminded him of the first time he'd kissed him, his body caught beneath Damon's on the bed, of not being able to move and desperately wanting to.

Soon, he felt the singer's tongue pressing at the space between his lips, begging for entry, and he surrendered, parting his lips and letting his friend overtake him. He closed his eyes, painfully aware of Damon's teeth as he gently pulled on his lower lip, soft, yet insistent hands pressing him backward, downward, into submission. Already he could feel the other man pressing into him, his deft fingers eliciting pleasant mewls from the back of Graham's throat.

He felt strange when Damon touched him, a whole variety of emotions overcoming him. He didn't want to tell him to stop, but he probably should've. The right thing to do seemed miniscule in the heat of the moment, in light of the physical pleasure Damon was oh-so-talented at dispensing.

If there was one thing he had to give Damon credit for, in the last few years, it was his attention to detail in the event of foreplay. For instance, the anatomical map of pleasure and reaction he had come to associate with Graham's body, the procedural application of simultaneous pressure and swiftness in his movements. Nothing too slow, nothing too fast, and not a breathe or a moan wasted in the process. It had only been a few minutes, and already he so hard it almost felt painful, his erection caught between his belly and the warm body above him.

He wondered how far away Alex was, how much longer it would take

for him to pick him up from at the studio, if the door was locked. His mind spun, too preoccupied with the thought of Damon touching him to think much further than that. Seconds later, he heard the zipper of his jeans slide down, and felt a well-trained hand wrap around him, relinquishing him entirely of his train of thought. He let out a stifled moan, his lips dry, and lifted his hips upward, into the singer's touch. It was unfair that Damon was capable of doing this to him, he thought, in the middle of a studio, in broad daylight and without any discretion or care as to whether they would be seen.

He bit his tongue as he felt Damon's pace quicken, his hot breath on his neck, his teeth at his ear. It got Damon off to know he had this much control over him, it had to. That he could stop at any time, and walk away, leaving a distraught Graham totally helpless and begging for more.

Soon, he felt the singer pause, and he feared for a moment that he was stopping, that he was indeed going to leave him helpless after all. Then he heard the sound of another zipper, and felt Damon's hands on him once again, both of their erections now pressed together, head to head, stroking the both of them simultaneously.

The heat that enveloped the both of him was almost too much for him, and he called out Damon's name, his hands threaded in the singer's thick hair, callused, yet gentle fingertips bringing him closer and closer to the edge. He still wondered if Damon would stop, if he would let him finish or demand more of him, or worse, leave him helpless. His head spun, the drunkenness of pleasure overwhelming his thoughts. He shivered as he heard Damon's stifled moan against him, his teeth biting into the soft flesh of his shoulder.

It was then that he heard the turn of the handle, the door of the studio squeaking open, and he froze. It hadn't been locked. He didn't look up, and a few seconds he heard the sound of the door shutting once again, as though whoever had walked in on them had tried their best to remain unnoticed.

Damon's body was tense above him, and after a few painful moments of silence, he withdrew, quickly reaching for his clothing and getting off of the couch.

"Who was that?" Graham asked, his voice unnervingly quiet. His mind raced with a thousand possibilities. Had it been Alex coming to pick him up? Justine, dropping by to see how Damon was doing? Jane

coming back to pick something up that she'd forgotten?

Damon stared at the door for a while, his eyes cold and expressionless. All warmth that had been there moments ago seemed to have disappated.

"I don't know. I didn't see them."

Graham stared up at the singer, his eyes tracing over the lines of his body. It wasn't often he saw Damon like this, in this much light. His eyes traced over the lean, subtle muscles of his chest, and then to his shoulders and arms. His eyes lingered on a particular spot, confused, bewildered.

"What are you looking at?"

Graham clenched his teeth. "What is that?"

"What is what?"

"This." Graham took a hold of the singer's arm, stretching it out in front of the both of them so that the skin normally covered by his shirt sleeve was exposed. Angry red track marks, almost unnoticeable at first, but now painstakingly obvious, traced up the length of Damon's upper arm.

Graham had seen these markings before, months ago, on an occasion when Damon had been pushing him into bed more forcefully than he would have liked. And in the midst of the removing of clothes, he had glanced at it, the red marks staring back him angrily, and couldn't help but wonder how much Justine had to do with it. He'd hoped they would have disappeared by now, faded into another bad memory...but now they looked worse, angrier, more desperate than they did before.

"So is this what you've been doing in your spare time, then? Participating in another of Justine's recreational activities?" Graham scoffed, feeling a bitterly familiar anger rushing back into his consciousness.

Damon looked back at him, his face expressionless, guiltless. He said nothing.

Graham glared at him, his teeth clenched. Suddenly everything seemed much clearer than it had a few minutes ago.

"And you wonder why I'm disgusted being with you."

The singer quickly brushed Graham's hand off of him, pulling the sleeve of his shirt over his arm once again.

"What I do in my free time is none of your business. And on that note, I would hardly call you the safest bet either, Gra." Damon retorted, his voice sounding as sharp as a razor blade.

It was funny, Graham thought, how quickly things could change. How a single, redeeming moment could be so easily destroyed by the same man who had caused it. He stood up, fixing his trousers and reaching for the bag he'd left on the floor earlier.

"I'm leaving."

"Good. Great. Please do."

Graham got halfway to the exit before stopping, his legs seeming to forget how to function all of a sudden. If he'd been weaker at hiding his emotions, he probably would have had to hide his eyes, but thankfully he had gotten used to feeling like this around Damon more and more often these days.

How many days did they go without fighting? How many hours, in-between the random bouts of Damon either yelling at him, and/or roughly pressing the back of his knees against the edge of a bed, had they actually gotten along? He could count the number of times on his fingers alone, they were so rare.

He stared at the back of Damon's head for a moment, trying to summon up to the courage to say something, anything. But nothing came. Just blank frustration and pain.

The singer remained silent, his face still turned away from Graham. His body lay hunched over the table, his head in his hands as though he were contemplating something very troublesome or complicated. Graham couldn't tell which. He wanted to pretend that Damon was sorry, that he was experiencing some sort of personal guilt on the guitarist's behalf.

"I'm not coming back." He said quietly, looking back at the singer. "I quit."

If Graham had ever tested Damon's limits in the course of their friendship, ever, then it was now. This was test. This was the moment that Damon was supposed to cave in, to walk over to Graham and tell him that he was sorry and that everything would be okay, that he shouldn't leave because, damn it, he loved him. This was his final cue, his redemption or his coup de grâce.

He waited, and after a few excruciating moments of silence, he heard Damon clear his throat.

"Well," he began. "What are you waiting for?"

**

When Graham got to the car, he noticed that Alex made a point of not looking at him. He sat, rigid in the driver's seat, smoking fag in hand, his eyes staring out into oblivion as though he were deep in thought. It was only until after Graham had placed his bag in the back seat and cleared his throat that Alex seemed to notice him at all.

He watched as Alex's hand moved mechanically to the clutch, his thin lips wrapped around a lit cigarette. His dark fringe obscured his eyes. He didn't look at Graham at all as he spoke.

"You ready to go now?"

Graham nodded, staring out the window so that he didn't have to experience the potential horribleness of making eye contact with Alex. He could tell, already, that he had betrayed him somehow.

They hadn't even been together like that, not really anyway. There had something, but they hadn't defined it. Maybe they hadn't wanted to. Alex wasn't the sort of person to define things like that, not between the both of them anyway. Not like how Graham needed to define himself with Damon.

Graham couldn't help but think sometimes that if Damon hadn't been around, if he hadn't arrived at Goldsmith's when he had, that perhaps things would have been different.

After a moment, he broke the silence. "I'm sorry you had to see that."

"Oh, that?" The bassist smiled, as though the thought of it were funny, almost.

"I've been seeing that for years now, Gra. Same scene, just a different day."

Alex sighed tiredly, smiling a sad smile. He deftly flicked the ash off the end his cigarette, his long slender fingers hanging just outside the window.

"Makes no difference to me anymore."

The bass player reached out his hand to the stereo, turning a knob pushing in a cassette tape into the deck. The sound of Joy Division filled the space of silence in the cab as Graham stared out at the gray English landscape, blankly, his heart anchored to the pit of his stomach, and he and Alex said nothing to each other for the rest of the ride.

**

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

> First and foremost, I really appreciate all the love and comments you have left about asking where this story is going, even after all these years. Thank you so much. This story has been in the works in my head for a while—a lot of it felt very personal and hard to finish for that reason. That said, I really appreciate your patience, and please know that I will do my best to update this story—there are a couple of new chapters written as I am posting this. Also, please forgive me for any errors as this is not beta'ed. Thank you. xx

“I’m not leaving you here. I made a promise.”

“I know.”

Graham had held onto the emptiness in pit of his stomach for so long that he no longer remembered what he felt like without it.

"I told her." Damon said in a low voice.

“Told her what?" Graham's ears were ringing in a low frequency.

"I told her everything. She left." Damon took a deep breath, sounding as though he were going to burst into tears at any moment.

Graham's eyebrows furrowed, still looking down between the soles of his sneakers dangling just off the precipice. He could no longer see the people down below his precious window.

What was that stupid joke again? He thought. *It's not the fall that kills you...it's the landing.*

His mind turned to memory—the thought of Damon's dry lips against his cheek, that warm childhood bed. His heart ached, the taste of dried blood on his chapped lips.

Why is it, he thought, *that people hold onto their weaknesses with the same masochistic grip that keeps them trying to attach meaning to their lives?* He closed his eyes.

"Gra?" Damon's voice was quiet.

"What?"

"Are you still there?"

Graham's body shivered as another gust of freezing wind sank into his frail frame.

"Of course I'm still here."

Graham looked back. The window where Damon had been was empty, vacant.

Graham blinked for a few moments, snapping back to reality. Dry eyes stung, and he began to laugh at the absurdity. His heart welled, so swollen he was sure it would burst at any moment. Suddenly, everything made sense, as though someone had torn away at the shreds of delusion in his head for the very first time. He felt the cold air rush underneath his fingertips, shivers going down his spine.

He closed his eyes, head spinning behind closed eyelids. Struggling, he pushed himself to stand, one loose hand grasping the two-thirds empty bottle of vodka next to him. Fingers clung uncertain to the vinyl siding as he made his way back into his house, peering down at the un-played answering machine. The red light glared back at him, an angry demon. He couldn't remember the last time he'd answered it. He pressed the play button, and the whirring sound of the tape filled the vastness of the room.

"Graham, it's Alex. I haven't heard from you in a few days, are you okay?"

Skip.

"Gra, it's Alex again. I know you're home. Why haven't you returned my calls? We're starting to get worried—"

Next.

"Graham, this is getting ridiculous. I know you're having a hard time, but if you don't pick up I'm going to call the police—"

Skip. Skip. Skip.

Still swaying, Graham peered down at the telephone dial. Without thinking, he pressed the one number he still had on speed dial.

The voice of a woman appeared on the other end. His heart tumbled.

"Hello?"

Graham's voice caught in his throat, unable to speak. He felt the panicked drumbeat of his heart against his chest. Anxiety—like a freight train coming at his head.

"Hello, who is this? Is someone there?"

Graham heard Damon's muffled voice on the other end. "Who is it?"

"Hello?" Justine asked again, before her hand muffled the receiver. "I don't know. There's no caller ID. Do you know that number?"

"No. It's probably a wrong number, just hang up."

Click. A dead signal.

Graham exhaled, and the phone dropped to the floor, the receiver hitting the bottom of the wooden counter with a hard thud. He picked up the bottle of vodka once again. *No thinking. Please, no more thinking.* He took another large swig.

Again, that stupid joke in his head. *It's not the fall that kills you, it's the landing.*

Graham stared into his living room, his eyes falling on the guitar perched in front of his television. His head felt…unglued. Some dissociative spell again, maybe a hallucination. He could hear Damon's voice, calling him in his head.

"Cor! Graham, come here!"

"What do you want, Damon? Jesus."

A vivid memory of Damon stood in the middle of Graham's living room, hands behind his back, trying to hide something from him. Damon smiled mischievously.

"Shh. You'll see. Come closer."

"I don't like surprises, Day..." Graham said lowly.

"I know, but you'll like this one. Trust me."

Graham sighed. "Okay, what is it?"

"Give us a kiss first."

"Christ, really?"

"Yes." Damon looked down at him with a serious look on his face.

Graham hesitated for a moment, then leaned forward and quickly kissed Damon on the lips.

"You need to do better than that. Come ‘ere." Damon reached one of his hands forward, pulling Graham toward him and kissing him deeply for more than a few seconds.

Graham felt the air in his chest leave his body, leaning into the Damon's embrace. He laughed, pulling back, and feeling the blood rush to his cheeks.

Damon grinned, ruffling Graham's hair. "You're adorable, Gra."

Damon pulled his hands out from behind his back, revealing a vintage fireglow Rickenbacker. "This is for you."

Graham stared back at Damon, his mouth agape.

"No, you didn't." Graham shook his head in disbelief.

Damon was grinning from ear to ear. "Yes, I did."

"That isn't..." Graham trailed off, pointing to the guitar.

"It is. This is the one you wanted, isn't it?" Damon smiled back at him with bright eyes.

"You're meaning to tell me that you bought one of Paul Weller's actual guitars? For me."

"Well, I mean..." Damon shrugged, still smiling and rolled his eyes. I know you wanted it."

Graham's mouth was still wide open. "H-How did you?"

"Alex knew someone who knew someone...and you know, we have some money now so I figured..."

"You are such a bastard."

"Do you like it?" Damon asked, sounding worried.

"Of course I like it, you arsehole." Graham laughed, pushing Damon

backwards. "I don't even want to know what you paid for this."

"Doesn't matter what it cost." Damon shook his head, leaning in toward Graham and kissing him once more. "Although, I do know of one way you could pay me back..."

Damon smirked, his hands lifting up Graham by the legs and carrying him toward the bedroom.

Graham, still watching the imaginary scene in front of him, felt his heart drop slowly to the floor.

He quietly walked toward the Rickenbacker. Staring into the adjacent mirror over the mantle he looked back at his disillusioned self—disheveled hair, pale skin. *Who would want this?* The answer came back to him immediately: *No one.*

Lifting his head up, he stared into his own reflection, wondering for the first time if had lost more than he had gained.

A tiny voice spoke to him from what sounded like a million miles away. *It's unhealthy to live in the past all the time, isn't it?*

He looked thin, too thin, pale flesh stretched over the frame of a face that seemed to be as white as the walls behind him. His shirt clung to him like a oversized tent, once fitting, but now grossly disproportionate in contrast to his shrunken frame.

His hands reached down, gripping the neck of the guitar. Using all his strength Graham raised the Rickenbacker above his head, slamming the butt of it down into the wooden floor repeatedly. The broken instrument fell into a million pieces in a cacophony of string and splintered wood, no longer beautiful. He threw what was left of the rosewood neck across the room where it landed with a skittering halt. He looked back at the pale face in the mirror.

What a waste.

White knuckles connected to the mirror in front of him and all at once his reflection became a jarred cacophony of splits and edges. His hand shaking, he looked down at his cut open hand, ripped open and bleeding bright red. He punched the mirror again with his other hand, this time the broken glass sticking into his right hand and running bright trails of blood down his arms.

Falling back onto the living room floor he marveled at the color of

red, and how quickly it was leaving him. It was funny, he thought, how the painkillers he'd taken earlier had numbed him to the point that he could even feel the large shards of glass sticking into his hands.

Inhaling a shallow breath, he leaned his head back against the fireplace mantle and laid his hands onto the floor. Soon, he would be lightheaded and then everything would be fine.

Besides, after all this, the landing was nothing.

**

Graham awoke to the sound of broken glass jangling across tile. His eyes were slow to focus, a white ball of pain jutting from his arms straight into the back of his skull.

Was he dead? Was this hell?

Callused hands grabbed at his chest, tugging at his t-shirt, trying to move him. The sensation felt distant, as though reality itself was underwater. His head was unplaceable, a spinning top. Broken glass crunched under the weight of feet around him. For a moment he thought he recognized Damon's face staring back at him. He tried to open his mouth to speak, but nothing came out. His entire body was weak—the ground around him, a sort of red.

Another sharp pain jutted straight through his body like lightning. He felt himself slipping, his stomach churning at the sight of his own arms, sheet white. He could feel Damon's warm hands on his body as he picked him up. He was so warm. He felt like the sun. There were more faces, more sounds, but far away, underwater. It reminded him of being a child, his face underneath the bathwater. There, he would hold his breath as long as possible, safe from everyone, beneath the waves. Obscured reality. No one could hurt him there.

Graham looked down. His arms faded into a blurred red, into pain, into nothingness. He couldn't feel them anymore. They might as well have been gone. Phantom pain.

The sirens were distant, Damon's face a memory. He closed his eyes. The pain was gone.

**

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

> Sorry for the cliffhanger last night, and thanks for your patience. I needed some sleep before I could format this chapter. :-)

It had taken Damon almost good minute before he'd realized that he'd stopped breathing.

Damon inhaled, watching the red swirls of his friend's blood leave his hands and trail down down the bright white sides of porcelain sink in front of him. His hands were shaking.

Sounds of hospital buzzed around him. The entire floor was bathed in the sort of sickly yellow fluorescent light that constantly reminded him of death. The stench of sanitization. His ears were ringing in a low frequency.

Damon bit his lip so hard he almost drew blood. Thoughts swirled in his head in an unceasing chain. *Why couldn't you understand it wasn't about us?*

He held his hands too close under the air hand dryer, unperturbed by the sensation of it burning his skin. At this point he welcomed any sort of sensory pain that might wake him up from this nightmare.

Someone cleared their voice behind him and Damon snapped back to reality.

"Alex–"

"You need to leave." Alex glared back at him.

"Alex, I—let me explain."

"No, I know you." Alex leaned against the stall, his arms crossed. "You played games with him. You led him to this, and—"

"Alex," Damon interrupted, his face weary. "If this is about you and Graham and I..."

"Shut up. You don't know shite about anything." Alex seethed. His face was pale and eyes bloodshot. They both hadn't slept all night.

"Graham could have died today." Alex said slowly, emphasizing every word. "Our friend, *your best friend*, would be dead."

Damon glared at Alex, his face red. "Christ, Alex. I didn't do this to him."

Suddenly Alex grabbed Damon's wrist, slamming him against the stall so hard he could have sworn it was going to leave a bruise.

"Stop playing stupid, Damon. We all know that all you care about when it comes to Graham is if he's sucking your dick."

Damon opened his mouth to say something, then stopped realizing he could say nothing.

Alex scanned Damon's face as though he were looking for some sort of remorse.

"Let me talk to him." Damon took a deep breath. "I can fix this."

"You don't fix things, you just make things worse." Alex spat. "And you know what else? If you hadn't found him, no one would have let you come here."

"Right, well. Thanks for that truth bomb, Alex."

"You're always welcome." Alex frowned before exiting the bathroom.

***

Damon could hear the monitor beeping softly as entered the room. The sound was jarring, like nails across a chalkboard, a constant reminder that this was his fault.

Graham laid asleep in the hospital bed, skinny and pale. He looked small, fragile, like the Graham he used to know—all skin and bones stacked on top of each other as they clung to each other in their childhood beds, skins flush from sweat and their bodies swollen. Graham would creak beneath him and Damon would wrap his arms around him and promise to protect him, this tiny fragile thing.

And now, this tiny fragile thing was in front of him, in a million pieces.

Damon reached his hand out, stopping halfway. Graham's skin looked cold, pale, his hands wrapped in bandages.

All the words he wanted to say stuck to his tongue like dry sandpaper.

I love you.

I'm sorry.

This is my fault.

Damon held his head in his hands, his heart firmly anchored to the pit of his stomach. He thought of that long-ago summer in his bed when Graham's warm body was against his own, touching him, caressing him. If only they had never...maybe then...

"Who's there?"

Damon looked up to see Graham staring back at him through half-slitted eyes. His taped up glasses were beside him on the bedside table.

Damon looked back at him, mouth agape and frozen.

Graham stared off into distant space. Damon's silence was enough to let him know who was there.

"Go away."

Damon opened his mouth to speak, his voice small.

"Gra—"

"Why are you even here?" Graham interrupted coldly.

"Do you not remember anything?"

Graham stiffened, still avoiding eye contact.

"You called me, don't you remember?"

Graham's face was still blank, an empty canvas.

"You called me and you sounded out of it, to say the least. I went to look for you because I was worried." Damon's throat tightened. "When I got to your house you were on the floor with glass in your hands."

Graham turned toward the window again.

"I rushed you to the hospital." Damon's voice trembled. “But if I hadn't gotten there in time….”

Damon turned away from Graham, his eyes stinging. He had never been much of one for expressing emotion, but even this was hard for him to hold back.

"Christ, Gra." Damon mumbled, stopping for a beat. "The doctor said that you were mixing alcohol with your pain medication. And that you were probably hallucinating."

Damon lowered his voice to a whisper. “It looked like you were trying to kill–”

"I know what it looked like.” Graham cut him off sharply. "You don't need to explain it to me."

"Then what the hell did you think you were you doing?" Damon seethed. "Did you even think about how this would affect everyone else? Or how selfish you are being?”

Graham refused to make eye contact, still looking out the window. Anger was always the way Damon reacted to anything painful. Always.

You are such a dick. Damon could hear Alex’s words in his head.

Damon shook his head. "Look, fuck. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to—"

"You should have left me there." Graham interrupted.

Damon blinked, taken back. "What?"

"You should have left me there." Graham repeated solidly.

"Graham—“

"Leave me alone."

"Graham, don't—"

“By the way," Graham said, lifting his bandaged hands. "The doctor said I might not be able to play guitar anymore. So now you'll *really* have to get a new guitarist."

"Graham—" Damon's voice cracked for a third time, whether from anger or desperation Graham was not sure.

"Don't." Graham interrupted him, his jaw tightening. "I don't know why you came in here. Everyone out there thinks you saved me. Everyone thinks you're the hero as usual and I'm the fuck up."

"Graham, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to say those things... Let me talk to you—"

"You should have left me there," Graham said, his voice turning acidic. "It's the least you could have done."

"Graham, please…"

“No."

Someone placed their hands on Damon shoulders. They must have been watching them from the back of the room the whole time.

"Come on, Damon," Alex said quietly. "It's time to go."

"Don't fucking touch me." Damon shook Alex off his back, his face red.

"Graham."

"Come on, Damon." Alex said quietly.

Damon took one last look at Graham, and shook his head.

As he exited the room, Alex pushed him into the corridor.

"I don't want you anywhere near him. The only time you see him is band practice. Do you understand me?"

"Get your bloody hands off me." Damon growled.

"I'm serious. If you even so much as fuck with Graham's head in the least, I will have your head." Alex glared at him. "You stay the fuck away from him."

"Alex, you have no idea what you're–"

“This wouldn’t have happened if you hadn’t kicked him out of the band, you egotistical asshole."

"I didn't kick him out, he quit." Damon shot back, pointing toward Graham's room. "Regardless, this is NOT normal behavior, Alex."

Alex shook his head. "Right. And what exactly constitutes *normal* in

your life, Damon? Is it falling in love with your best friend, and keeping it a secret from everyone including your girlfriend all the while knowing that it'll never work out, just to fuck up your life? Is that it? Is that normal?"

Damon shook his head, looking down at his shoes. "You're right, Alex. Okay? Is that what you want to hear? I am an asshole."

Alex let go of Damon's jacket.

"Stay away from him. I'm serious."

**

Chapter 8

Clinggg.

"Fuck."

Graham slid his fingers down the length of the guitar neck, his hands forming a bar chord.

Clingggg.

"Fuck!"

Another bar chord, an easier one this time.

Clannng.

"FUCK!"

Graham slammed his guitar against the floor with a hollow and deafening crash. He looked down at his hands shaking, still red from where the stitches had been taken out.

Alex put a hand on his shoulder. "Graham, it's ok—"

"Don't fucking touch me." Graham yelled, his face red.

Eyes wide, Alex removed his hand. "Okay, okay."

Alex bent over, gingerly picking up the guitar from the floor.

"This is going to take time, Gra. You'll be able to play again, in time. Look, Damon can record the guitar parts for the record, and you can play them on the tour. It's going to be fine."

Alex looked into Graham's eyes, desperately trying to read him. "Now, will you please let me touch you?"

Graham stared down at the floor, motionless. His body was stiff and cold, his face emotionless. Alex wrapped his hands around Graham's neck, rubbing his stiff shoulders.

"Hey." Alex touched his forehead to Graham's, whispering quietly. "You're the most talented man I know, Gra. You can do this. You can get past this."

Graham turned away from Alex, breaking eye contact. They heard the door to the studio open with a loud creak behind them. Damon stood in the doorway, staring at the both of them with cold dispassion.

"Oh, did I interrupt something?" Damon asked, clearly indifferent. He turned back toward the door as if to leave.

"No. You didn't interrupt anything." Alex stood up, flashing a contemptuous look at Damon as he walked past him. "He's all yours."

"Cheers, Alex." Damon bit his bottom lip, struggling to hold back like an arguing parent would in front of their child. Graham had noticed this strained mincing of words between Alex and Damon for a whole month now, and so far Damon seemed to be on the losing end.

Damon peered down at the huddled mass of Graham sitting on the chair in front of him. Walking across the room he picked up a guitar, strummed it a few times as though to indicate that this visit was entirely nonchalant, and sat down next to Graham.

"Hey."

Graham ignored Damon, opting instead to hunch his body into a pensive and unwelcome shape.

"How's it going? How's your..." Damon wavered, wincing at a now-familiar pang of guilt. "How are your hands today?"

Graham remained unresponsive, only the tightening and clenching of his jaw indicating any sort of answer.

"Look, it's okay if you can't play right now... we can try and push the deadline for the record back. I can talk to the record company, I'm sure they would understand that we can't replace you."

Graham stared down at his shoes, seemingly apathetic to anything Damon was saying.

"Gra, please talk to me." Damon took a deep breath. "I can't do this anymore. I can't handle you not talking to me."

Another long silence passed between them.

"Look, I know you hate me, and I don't expect you to stop anytime soon." Damon reached his hand out to Graham's knee, fingers shaking and unsure if he was overstepping his bounds.

"But please, just talk to me."

Without warning, Graham collapsed into a shaking mass of hyperventilation, his body convulsing like a wire dropped into water. Frightened instinct taking hold, Damon leapt forward, securing his arms around Graham and holding him as tightly as possible.

This wasn't a surprise, Damon knew. He was having another panic attack, the third one this week.

Damon pressed himself into Graham's shoulder, feeling his best friend's rapid heart beat against his chest. His hand caressed the back of Graham's neck, willing him to calm down. Swallowing slowly, he whispered into Graham's ear the most reassuring thing he could think of.

"Shh, it's going to be okay."

No, it's not. He's not okay.

Damon forced the thought out of his head, reaching his arms up and holding Graham's head in his hands.

"I'm sorry, Gra. I know you don't believe me, but I am so, so sorry."

Damon let go, rubbing his own swollen eyes with the back of his sleeve and looking off to the side. This was far too much emotion for Damon, he knew. Graham raised his head, still shaking, but finally making eye contact.

"Why are you doing this?" Graham asked, his voice so small it was almost a whisper.

"What do you mean?" Damon asked, confused.

"Why are you adding another painful memory to this story?"

Damon opened his mouth to speak, his face distorted in pain and guilt. "I just want to help you."

Graham stood up from his chair, wiping his sleeve across his face like a 3-year-old.

"I can't do this. I have to go." Graham said quietly, heading toward the door.

"Wait."

Graham froze, his back turned towards Damon.

"I stopped using." Damon said quietly, wavering on his feet. "Graham, I *promise* you, I'm clean now."

Graham shook his head. "Why are you telling me this?"

"Because it matters. I stopped—" Damon inhaled sharply. "I stopped because she's gone, Graham. Justine is gone."

Graham looked up at the ceiling, small tears running what felt like acid trails down his cheeks. He smiled, as though delusional, then let out a painful laugh.

"Why are you laughing? This is not a joke." Damon asked, evident pain in his voice.

"Because I've heard you tell me that before."

Graham turned the doorknob on the studio door. "I'll see you later, Damon."

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Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

> Sorry for the delay on this chapter. Wanted to put a little more fluff Gramon into this one since the last few chapters were pretty quick. To reward your patience, here's a quick Gramon sketch I did of the scene in Chapter 2 when Damon pins Graham against the bed and makes him uncomfortable: http://achtung.tumblr.com/post/151575929141/achtung-quick-and-rough-little-gramon-sketch Thanks for reading!

According to his friends and to the band, to say that Graham was a regular at The Good Mixer would have been an egregious understatement. Graham was, in essence the mascot, nay, the sole proprietor in many ways of that fine establishment that called itself the seedy underbelly of British music in the 90's. Tour schedule permitting, one could undoubtedly bet on finding Graham Coxon drunkenly picking a fight with the jukebox every evening at The Good Mixer, flanked by two members of Menswear or whoever had decided to be his groupie that night.

"What's your fucking problem, man?"

"What's your fucking problem, maaaan?" Graham spat back in possibly his worst impression of an American accent. He slammed his fist against the table, spilling suds off the top of his pint glass.

"Look, if you've got a problem with George Harrison you can fuck off, you sod." Graham slurred, before downing the rest of his beer. Which beer was this? Ninth, Tenth? He couldn't remember.

"Right. And just because you think you're a fucking celebrity doesn't mean I can't kick your ass."

Graham grinned his best shit-eating grin, watching as the crowd in The Good Mixer circled around them. This was truly Graham in his element, gregarious, feeling ten feet fall, and lubricated with self-confidence.

"Oh, you'd hit a man in glasses, eh?" Graham spat sardonically. He pointed toward his face. "Well, I've had a few. So go ahead and take your best shot."

Without missing a beat, the expat punched him with nauseating force, knocking his glasses off his face. Graham stumbled backwards into the table, knocking a slew of pint glasses to the floor. Blood immediately rushed from his nose. Blinded, he peered down at his glasses, one arm snapped backward and barely hanging on by a thread.

“Fuck.”

"Alright, break it up!" The bar’s bouncer yelled, parting the sea of people with his large forearms. He roughly picked up Graham by the collar and began to drag him out of the bar.

Graham winced as he was thrown out into alleyway, the asphalt scraping his knee as he landed.

"Look Graham, I know you come here every night, but you can't keep doing this, mate. The customers are getting tired of this, and I'm getting tired of throwing you out."

Graham pushed himself up onto all fours, swaying as he struggled to stand. "Cor, look man... it's not my fault. It was him, he started—"

The bouncer shook his head sternly. "No, I don't want to hear it." He pointed to the mess of blood on the front of Graham's shirt. "Look at you. You're fucked up alright. Do you have a ride home?"

Graham held his arm up to the wall for support. "No...." Graham drawled. "Do you have a cig?"

"Cor, Graham!"

Graham spun around to see Damon on the sidewalk adjacent to the alleyway, frantically waving his hands in the air.

"Perfect, there you go. There's your mum." The bouncer scowled before closing the door.

"Graham!"

Graham stumbled toward Damon, shifting precariously from side to side as he patted his pockets for cigarettes.

"Dames, Dames, Dames...” Graham slurred, leaning on Damon’s shoulder in the sort of affectionate way that immediately informed Damon he was not sober.

“Do ya have a cig?"

"Jesus, Graham. What happened to your face?" Damon asked, grabbing Graham by the chin.

Graham shook him off, squinting and pointing to the splay of blood on his face. "Oh this? You should see the other cunt."

"Christ." Damon sighed, dusting off Graham's jacket like a concerned mother. "Okay, let's get you home."

***

Damon held Graham underneath his shoulder as they stumbled toward the door of Graham's house, Graham teetering every few steps of the way.

"Good hell, I always forget how far away you live." Damon heaved as he set Graham down on the doorstep. Expertly fishing the keys out of Graham's pocket, Damon momentarily fumbled with the lock before opening the door. Squatting, he moved to pick up Graham, this time with Graham facing him.

"Come on, Gra. You gotta get up and help me out—"

Damon froze as Graham suddenly embraced him with both arms, his head drunkenly drooping over the back of Damon's shoulder. Damon's heart tumbled, melancholic at the sensation of feeling Graham's warm body against his own for the first time in months.

"Damo, you're the best. You're my favorite mate." Graham proclaimed loudly, slurring the last two syllables. "I want you to know that."

"Hmm," Damon grunted as he kicked the open the door with his foot. "You must be really drunk."

Carrying them both into the bathroom, Damon gently set Graham down on top of the toilet seat and turned on the hot water for the bath to fill.

He held Graham by the shoulders, looking directly into his eyes with sober concern. "Are you going to be sick?"

Graham shook his head enthusiastically.

"You're sure?" Damon asked again. "Because if you throw up on this shirt I will never forgive you. I'm serious."

Graham rolled his eyes, his body slouching against the tank of the toilet. “Can I have a cigarette?”

“Jesus Christ, right now?”

Graham nodded very matter-of-factly, as though being drunk had allowed him to revert back to toddler behavior.

Damon patted his pants pockets, fishing out a pack of cigarettes and shaking his head in dismay.

“Alright, here you go.” He motioned for Graham to stand up. "Now, come on. Clothes off."

Damon tugged on the hem of Graham's Dinosaur Jr. t-shirt, pulling it over his shoulders and unbuttoning his pants with impressive ease. Graham swayed on his seat, giving Damon an untrusting look.

"Oh Jesus, do you want me to look the other way?" Damon asked sarcastically. "It's not like I haven't seen it before."

Graham shook his head, stepping into the bathtub and enjoying the warm water rush over his body. His head was still too fuzzy to completely process the situation.

"Thanks." Graham hiccuped, smiling a half-smile at Damon. “Oh, can I have a light?” Graham stuck his chin out, cigarette in lips, waiting for Damon to light the cherry and Damon obliged.

Mere seconds after he inhaled his first, exquisite puff of nicotine, Graham’s body sunk back into the bathtub with heroin-like grace.

"You know, I'm fine. You can leave now. It's okay. I can take care of myself." Graham said quietly, before taking a long drag on his cigarette.

Damon wanted to laugh at how ridiculous Graham looked, a full grown naked man smoking a cigarette in a bathtub, his elbows twisted inward toward his body as though trying to make himself smaller, invisible. It was the same pose Damon noticed Graham exhibiting during every interview or uncomfortable situation, painfully conscious of his social anxiety.

Realizing he might have been staring for too long, Damon quickly looked away. "No, it's okay. I'm alright with staying."

"Why?" Graham looked up at the ceiling, frowned, and took a long drag on his cigarette. "Do you not trust me?"

Ignoring Graham's question, Damon handed him a washcloth and a bar of soap. They both knew this conversation was going into a territory they wouldn't be able to come back from.

"Here, you have to do this yourself. I draw the line at washing you like your mother."

"Right." Graham rolled his eyes again, invoking the same teenage mannerisms Damon had known him to never grow out of, and began washing the blood off his face. He could see Damon looking at him out of the corner of his eye, his gaze falling on Graham's bare chest, eyes drawing patterns up and down his body.

Damon must have been cognizant of this because within a few seconds he averted his gaze. Instead, his eyes focused on the adjacent living room where he had found Graham passed out a few months ago.

Damon cleared his throat, opting to stare at his feet instead.
He reached into his pocket and took out a cigarette and lighter. Ever-gracefully he lit the cigarette underneath his hand and took a draw, Graham watching the movement of his lips the entire time.

God, of all the worst times to be turned on. Graham thought.

"How are your hands?"

Graham pulled his hands out of the water, offering them to Damon. They were still shaky, but not as bad as they had been. Damon held Graham's palms in his hands, turning them over and gently caressing the faded stitching scars in a motherly way.

"They look better." Damon paused. "How's your playing?"

"Better-ish." Graham shrugged, his shoulders sinking. "I'm not sure it will ever be the same."

"Hmm." Looking distracted by thought, Damon massaged the inner palms of Graham's hands a little longer and then handed them back to him. There followed a long, tense silence before Graham finally cleared his throat.

"Can you hand me a towel?" Graham pointed toward the bathroom cupboard. Damon reached into the cupboard, throwing him a towel and looking away for courtesy's sake as Graham stood up from the bathtub.

"Er, you can leave now." Graham laughed meekly, sounding more like he meant it as a statement rather than a question.

Damon turned his head, "Oh, I need to use the lou."

"Right. Help yourself." Graham sauntered out of the bathroom, towel in hand, and left Damon to himself.

Watching Graham disappear down the hallway, Damon quickly locked the door behind him and turned on the sink faucet. Opening the medicine cabinet as quietly as possible, he quickly scanned the shelves.

"Damon!" Graham shouted from somewhere in the house.

"Hang on! I'll be right there."

Damon counted, squinting at the labels. One. Two. Sparing his better judgement, he quickly grabbed two prescription pain medicine bottles and deftly hid them in his jacket pocket. Taking one last look at his reflection in the mirror, he turned off the faucet and opened the bathroom door.

“Hello.”

Damon almost jumped ten feet, surprised to see Graham standing at the doorway.

“What took you so long?”

“Nothing, I…” Damon’s eyes trailed down, noticing that Graham still had not put a shirt on and was still wearing nothing save for a towel wrapped around his waist. Damon gritted his teeth. It was taking every ounce of willpower he had not to thrust Graham against the hallway wall and rip that towel off of him.

“Oh, I thought I heard something. ” Graham meandered back toward the bedroom, and Damon looked up toward the ceiling, silently cursing himself.

“Actually, Graham, I should probably leave—” Damon began, before

getting interrupted.

"Day?"

"Yes, Gra?"

"Come 'ere."

Damon hesitated, looking from the front door to the bedroom and back. Taking a deep breath he moved toward the bedroom.

"Are you staying with me tonight?"

Damon shook his head, leaning against the doorframe. "Actually, I don't think that's a good idea, Gra."

Graham looked up from the pillow, his face illegible. For the first time in a while, Damon found himself wishing he wasn't as sober as he was. Perhaps then it would be ok for them to… no. He stopped himself, shaking the thought out of his head.

"I thought you were worried about me being alone."

Damon stared down at his feet, uncomfortable. "I am, but I don't want to make this…" He paused, as though trying to find a better phrasing. "I wouldn't want to do anything that would make this—"

"Awkward?" Graham interrupted.

Damon frowned. "Hurtful."

Graham looked away, eyes glassy. "Okay."

"Right. Well," Damon nodded toward the door. "I'm going to head out then."

"Wait." Graham squeaked. "One thing."

"What?"

"Can I have a kiss?" Graham asked quietly, some of the syllables slurring along the way.

"Gra..."

"Please." Graham turned over onto his back. "You're not with.." He paused, as though not wanting to say the name aloud. "You're not

with her anymore, so it's okay, sort of."

Damon shifted uncomfortably. There was a genuine air of loneliness in Graham's voice, but he couldn't tell if it was just the alcohol making Graham more open to him or if he was genuinely trying to reconnect. Regardless, this wasn't safe territory and they both knew it.

"Graham, I don't think that's a good idea. I'm sorry."

Graham swallowed slowly, his shoulders sinking. "Okay." He turned over onto his side, facing away from Damon.

Damon moved toward the bedside table, reaching to turn off the lamp. His fingers hesitated, quietly admiring in the lamp light the long curvature of Graham's back, how each delicate vertebrae rose up from underneath pale, freckled skin. He wanted nothing more than to reach out and touch him, rip the blankets off him and—

"Goddammit, Gra."

Fighting every moral fiber in his body, Damon leaned down and kissed Graham. Lips parted, he pressed his mouth into Graham's with such force that it caught the guitarist off guard. Graham sunk backward into the bed, as though under duress, his eyes darting across Damon's face; unsure, untrusting.

Damon withdrew, immediately regretting his compulsion and realizing what a huge mistake he had made. "Good night, Graham."

Damon turned away, the image of Graham's untrusting face burned into his retina. *What a stupid, stupid thing to do* , he thought. Poised to leave, he grabbed his jacket before a tugging hand on his shoulder stopped him.

Unprompted and without warning, Graham pushed Damon against the doorframe with such force that it nearly knocked the wind out of him. In fact, had he not immediately been greeted thereafter by Graham's booze-soaked tongue Damon would have thought he'd been punched in the gut, which would have made more sense than what was happening now.

Graham tasted like whiskey and cigarettes. There were worse things for someone to taste like, of course, but the fact remained was that it was a familiar home to Damon and that was all that mattered.

Much to his surprise, Damon could already feel his erection pressing

against the zipper of his jeans. Mixed with his newfound sobriety, the idea of touching Graham again after all these months was too much for his mind to handle.

Graham pulled Damon down into another, more passionate kiss, catching him so off guard that he almost fell, head first, on top of Graham. Parting dry lips with teeth he willed Damon to come closer, tugging him down onto the bed.

Fighting his own inner demons, Damon resisted. "Graham, we can't—"

Indifferent to Damon’s objection, Graham kissed him again, this time pulling at the hem of Damon's jacket and shirt and pulling them up and over this head. Graham’s mouth began placating all the areas he was used to, neck, ears, chest, navel—fuck. All the sensitive and tender places he’d sorely missed as these months had gone by.

Damon held his breath as Graham moved downward, his hands moving to unbutton the clasp on Damon's jeans. Before he could finish, Damon grabbed his wrist.

"No." Damon looked at Graham with steady eyes. "We—I can't do this."

Graham looked at him in despair, four or five conflicting emotions flitting across his face simultaneously.

"I can't do this to you." Damon said quietly. "You're drunk."

Graham opened his mouth to protest but stopped as he heard the doorbell ring.

"Uh-oh." Graham stared back at him, eyes wide.

“Who is it?”

“You don’t want to know.” Graham groaned, rolling over onto his side. He shook his head, and then mouthed something that looked like: "I don't want to answer it."

"Fine." Damon sighed. "I'll go see who it is."

Shivering, Damon quickly shuffled down the cold hallway and reached for the door, pulling it open with a creak. Immediately, he regretted it.

"Oh." Alex James stared back at him from the porch, immaculate fringe swept to one side and bright eyes burning black holes into his forehead. Lit cigarette in hand, he quickly took stock of Damon’s

shirtless body.

"Why are you here?" Damon blurted out, clearly just as surprised and irritated as Alex.

"Funny, that's what I was about to ask you." Alex replied sharply. Damon noticed Alex's tone was more contemptuous than usual.

"I'm here because Graham called me from The Good Mixer two hours ago asking me to pick him up. But when I got there they'd told me that he'd gotten kicked out, so naturally I came here."

"I ran into him on the street." Damon explained, as though were a child trying to justify misbehavior to his mother. "He was drunk. He needed a hand to get home, Alex. All I did was help him get cleaned up and make sure he didn't get sick."

Standing on his toes, Alex peered over Damon's shoulder to see Graham naked on the bed, passed out in a drunken slumber.

"Looks like you two had a good time."

"Alex, nothing—"

"You know, I don't have very high standards either, Damon." Alex interrupted. "But I am truly impressed that you could stoop this low, even for you."

Damon bit his lip so hard he almost drew blood. "Alex, we didn't do anything I'm telling you."

"You do realize he tried killing himself a few months ago?"

"Jesus Alex, it's not like that. I told you—"

"No." Alex cut him off, holding up his hands. "It's okay. You don't have to explain anything to me. You're the one that'll have to live with it when he ends up in the hospital again."

Damon glared at Alex, full of vitriol. Alex knew he had Damon by the jugular, at least that much was obvious.

"Sleep well, Damon." Alex jeered before turning and walking off into the night.

When Damon returned to the bedroom, Graham had already nestled himself into the center of the mattress, leaving less than a foot for

Damon to squeeze into. Peeling the sheets back, he climbed into bed.

“I like Alex. He’s a good man, that Alex…” Graham muttered, half-asleep.

Damon stared up at the ceiling, unblinking, his arms stuck to his sides. He didn’t dare touch Graham, but he didn’t want to leave him alone either. He didn’t know what to do anymore. Everything he did was wrong. Anything he touched or loved was bound to break.

“He seems to care about you a lot.”

“Who?” Graham asked sleepily.

“Alex.”

“Yeah, Alex does care about me a lot... ” Graham mumbled half-coherently into the pillow.

After a few moments passed, Damon turned to face Graham who had begun snoring softly. Gingerly moving a stray strand hair out of Graham’s face and behind his ear, Damon whispered into the space between them.

“Yeah, but not as much as I do.”

**

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

> I'm sorry for this chapter. Well, not sorry. But I may go to hell for it writing. If so, that's okay, because it will be a beautiful hell. Anyway, I hope you enjoy. ;) Many thanks again for all the lovely comments and kudos, they are encouraging me to keep going.

Damon knew Alex liked Graham the moment he shook his hand at Goldsmith's College for the very first time. Maybe it had been the fringe, or the effeminate way Alex threaded a hand through his hair and straightened his spine as he opened the door, eyes pursuing Damon like he was an endangered species. Either way, it wasn't hard to read someone like Alex. After all, he was the sort of person who flirted with everyone.

"You must be Damon." He leaned forward and stuck his hand out. "I'm Alex."

"Pleasure." Damon responded with a tight-lipped smile. He furrowed his brow. "Do I know you?"

Alex's eyes widened. "Oh, Graham's talked a lot about you."

"Oh, good things I hope." Damon smiled and looked away. He covered the bottom part of his face with his hand. "I came by to see if I could talk to him. Is he here?" He held up a book-shaped package.

"Oh, damn. He just left." Alex rubbed at the stubble on his face. "But he said he'd be back soon. Why don't you come in and wait?"

Damon nodded and entered. He scanned the dorm room, fixating on the two poster-sized beds.

Crossing his arms, Alex cleared his throat. "So Graham told me that you and him went to school together?"

Damon raised an eyebrow, folding his hands behind his back. "Yeah, we go back I guess. We're old mates." He lifted his chin and stared down the bridge of his nose at Alex.

"You and Graham are roommates, I take?"

"Yeah." Alex blew out his cheeks. "For about a year now, I guess?

Yeah, that sounds about right."

Alex leaned against the wall with one foot resting on the other. He brushed a strand of hair behind his ear, pulling a pack of cigarettes out of his back pocket and offering it to Damon.

"Cig?"

"No, thanks."

Fixing a lit cigarette between his lips, Alex shoulders lifted in a shrug as though to say "suit yourself." He inhaled a deep breath and blew out slowly.

"So Graham told me you were going to school to be an actor?"

"Oh, yeah. Yes I am." Damon half-smiled, chewing on his bottom lip and looking up at Alex through his lashes. Suddenly it was apparent why Graham hadn't shut up about him for the last year.

"Makes sense." Alex's gaze dipped to Damon's chest. "I mean, you've got the face for it."

"Ha, thanks." Damon briefly touched his nose, looking out the window. He stood quietly for a moment.

"So are you, erm, an artist like Graham?"

"Oh no, not at all. I can't draw to save my life. I'm studying French actually." Alex leaned forward, plucking up one of his French study books and handing it to Damon who pretended to feign interest.

"That's funny." Damon leaned back and looked up. "That reminds me, Graham is always obsessing over—"

"Françoise Hardy?" Alex interrupted, finishing his sentence.

Damon tightened his lips, passing the book back to Alex.
"Yeah...exactly."

Alex cocked his head, pointing to the book Damon was holding. "What have you got there?"

"Oh, this?" Damon smiled. "This is just an old book we used to read a lot."

"Lemme guess. Narcissus and Goldmund? Herman Hesse?"

“Yeah.” Damon bowed his head, narrowing his eyes. “Graham told you about that too I guess.”

Alex tucked his chin slightly and smiled. “He does tend to go on about things sometimes.”

“Yeah.” Damon half-smiled and crossed his arms, rocking back and forth on his heels. Alex was happy to take the nonverbal cue.

“Well, I should probably head to class. I’m sure Graham will be back soon.” He paused. “Let yourself out, yeah?”

“Thanks. I won’t be long. I just need to talk to him so he’s not…” Damon hesitated. “Mad about something.”

“Right.” Alex winked at him. “I guess I’ll see you around then, Damon. Cheers.”

Damon waved back limply at Alex, looking up at the ceiling. He peered up at a giant New Order poster that framed the area above Alex’s bed. Below, the mattress was covered in a mass of poetry books and quantum physics textbooks. He collapsed on Graham’s bed, yelping as he fell onto a hard object.

“Shit—” Damon cursed out loud, before realizing that no else one was in the room. Reaching behind him he picked up what he recognized as one of Graham’s signature black sketchbooks. Sitting up, he carefully unbound the elastic holding the sketchbook closed. Allowing the pages to spill open, a small leaflet fell out onto the floor. Furrowing his brow, he quickly snatched it up and turned it over. It was a letter addressed to Graham, written in very neat handwriting.

Dear Gra,

I know you said you’d kill me if I wrote you French poetry, but I do love cheesy things (literally and figuratively) and I owe you for the gorgeous painting you did of me. I’m not much of a writer, so forgive me if it’s awful. I wish I could see things just as beautifully as you do.

Love always, Alex

Damon’s eyes darted across the page, his fingers grasping at the edge of paper so hard it nearly tore. Placing the letter back in place he quickly flipped through Graham’s sketchbook. He poured over several pages of sketched portraits he instantly recognized as Alex—a plethora of face studies, body studies, everything. He turned the page to see an

elaborately detailed illustration of Alex lying fast asleep in a mass of bed sheets, as though Graham had been drawing him from a bird's eye view. Damon rubbed his eyes, and his stomach turned. Shoulders bowed, he quickly slammed the sketchbook shut and placed it back onto the bed where he'd found it.

It's fine. He's moved on, of course. Damon thought. *Why would you be so stupid to think that he would wait for you anyway?*

Legs shaking as he rose from the bed, Damon grabbed his jacket and took out of the dorm room in a rush, making a point to chuck the book he'd brought into the trash bin as he left.

**

Alex cared about Graham in the same way a mother would care about a child. It was a doting, if not romantic, love. Ever since he'd seen Graham stepping out of his parent's car with a guitar at Goldsmith's he fallen in love with the idea of him, and that was all he needed. As a general rule, Alex was not the type of person to have a crush or a partner—it nevered suited him and he had better things to wank to. But that didn't mean that he didn't love the way Graham compulsively swore under his breath during paint class or the way his long and skinny hands perpetually wrung themselves every which way whenever he was overthinking—which was the majority of the time.

"Cor, Graham. Come 'ere you beautiful man, you." Alex curled an arm around Graham's waist, tugging him closer. Graham giggled, his cheeks and lips flush red from the last bottle of wine he'd finished off backstage.

Since the tour for The Great Escape had begun, Graham had turned to imbibing large amounts of alcohol on a daily, sometimes hourly basis which, despite some initial unease, made the band happy because they didn't have to deal with the raw emotional mess of Graham that they'd dealt with months earlier. A drunk Graham was a happy Graham, and more importantly, a performing Graham. And as it was, tonight being the last show of the tour, Graham and Alex had both decided that they would be celebrating appropriately.

Aside from Dave flitting in and out like a mother in a teenage boy's bedroom, Alex and Graham had been left mostly to their own devices in the backstage dressing room. Damon had a headache, or so he'd said, and had disappeared back to the hotel room; and Dave had

clearly reached his capacity for watching his bandmates snog each other for reasons he didn't want to think about.

"Shhh..." Alex giggled, touching Graham's shoulder. He pressed a finger to his lips. With what looked like expert precision, Graham watched Alex neatly cut two clean lines of cocaine on the table in front of them.

"Oh no, Alex..." Graham pinched his nose and shook his head furiously. "I can't. Damon would be mad."

"Oh, you're such a prude." Alex quipped, nudging Graham in the shoulder. "Damon doesn't have to know. It's our little secret." Bending forward, Alex snorted a line in one quick swoop. He shoved Graham in the chest, which caused Graham to begin giggling uncontrollably again.

"It feels good to be here though, doesn't it?" Alex smiled, tickling Graham. Graham squeezed his eyes shut, grimacing as though he were allergic to Alex's affection.

"Oh, come on, Gra. It's the last night of the tour! Soon we'll all go home to our girlfriends and..." Alex lifted his chin, acknowledging Damon as he entered the dressing room. "...boyfriends."

Alex uncorked another bottle of wine with a loud pop. "I say we have a drink to celebrate, yeah? Cheers Damon, have a drink with us."

"Cheers, what?" Damon turned away from them, digging through one of his bags.

"Have a drink with me and Graham."

"No, thanks."

"Oh come on, don't be a wanker." Alex quipped, making a quick jerk-off motion behind Damon's back which caused Graham to burst into another fit of giggles.

Damon quickly ran his hand through his hair, pressing his lips together. "Where are my headphones, Alex? Did you borrow them?"

"Oh, yeah I did."

"Well, will you fucking put them back in my bag then?"

"Yes, of course, mum." Alex jeered. He stretched extravagantly and

yawned, non-discreetly planting the tightly wound roll of bills into Graham's hands.

"Your turn to do this one, love." Alex kissed Graham on the forehead, making sure to linger long enough for Damon to notice. He quickly slipped a hand underneath the hem of Graham's shirt, causing him to emit a quiet mewl. "Don't miss me."

Tilting his head back, Graham swallowed the entire glass of wine in one go and set it down on the table with a hard clunk. Both palms to his forehead, fingers splayed, he peered down at the line of coke in front of him. He noticed Damon staring down at the lines of drugs on the table.

"What's this here, Club Alex?" Damon raised an eyebrow.

Graham fidgeted on his seat, looking down at his shoes.

"Don't worry, Damon. We children can take care of ourselves." Alex crossed his arms, taunting from the other side of the room. This was typical Alex these days, taking a jab at Damon's controlling parent ego at every possible opportunity.

"It's nothing, Dames. We were just having a good time." Graham shrunk backward, folding into himself.

Damon narrowed his eyes, his gaze darting back and forth between Alex and Graham. He looked tired, unshaven, clearly spent from the endless hours of being on tour and not in any mood to be around giggly children.

"What's this, then?" Damon asked, pointing a finger at the lines of coke on the table.

"What do you think it is?" Alex replied sarcastically.

"Don't take the piss, Alex." Damon clenched his jaw. He gestured toward Graham. "Are you making him do this?"

"Jesus, Damon. We're just celebrating. He's fine. Take a fucking chill pill—"

Without warning, Damon slammed his fist on the table. Graham flinched as some of the beer and wine bottles crashed to the floor in a loud cacophony of chinking glass. Both Graham and Alex froze, staring wide-eyed at Damon as though afraid to move.

“Whoa, *calm* down.” Alex held his hands up, mouth open. “It’s okay.”

“No, it’s not okay.” Damon snapped. “What the fuck do you think you’re doing?”

Alex stepped back. “We were just celebrating, Damon. Jesus. You’re overreacting a bit, don’t you think?”

“Celebrating? Or trying to make him a drug addict like you?”

“Wow…” Alex raised his eyebrows. “Graham was right about you. You are a complete hypocrite.”

Graham shrunk backward into the couch like a fragile snowflake. He had never seen Damon get this angry, not at the band, nor at him or anyone else. Clearly Alex could tell as much from reading Graham’s reaction, because he quickly transitioned into damage control mode.

“Look Damon, let’s talk about this, okay? Graham, you should go.” Alex touched Graham’s shoulder and quickly mouthed what looked like: “I’m sorry.”

Graham wrapped his arms around himself, staring up at them wide-eyed, like a child watching his parents fight for the first time.

“Alex, I–”

“No, Graham. It’s okay. Just go.” Alex shooed.

Not one to miss a second cue, Graham made a quick beeline for the door, leaving Alex and Damon alone by themselves.

Alex inhaled a deep breath and blew out slowly. “Look, Damon I don’t know what you saw or what you *think* you saw, but if you’re angry about it, that’s between you and me. Graham’s not a part of this—”

“Shut up.”

Damon abruptly shoved Alex backward. Alex stepped back, opening his mouth to protest but stopped as Damon forcibly kissed him on the lips. Freezing, Alex blinked, uncomfortably restrained between Damon’s thighs and the wall. Damon shoved his tongue down his throat, pushing him against the wall.

Panicking, Alex punched Damon as hard he could. He was on mark, but barely, his landing blow connecting to Damon’s left eye and nose.

"*Fuck!"* Damon yowled, covering his face. Glaring through spread fingers at Alex, his other hand wiped at the trail of fresh blood trickling out from his nose. "Jesus Christ, Alex."

"Well what the *fuck*, Damon?" Alex spat on the floor, wiping his mouth in disgust. "Why in the hell did you kiss me?"

Coughing, Damon spit red onto the floor. "Christ, I think you really fucked my nose up, Alex—"

Alex's eyes narrowed to crinkled slits. "Answer the question, Damon."

Throwing his head back, Damon held his shirt sleeve to his nose.

"I guess I wanted to see what all the fuss was about." Damon answered, slightly muffled.

"Wanker. What the fuck does that mean?"

Damon removed his hand from his nose, wiping at his upper lip.

"You know exactly what it means."

Clearly irate, Alex grabbed Damon by the neck and forced him back into the wall. Damon squirmed underneath his grip, not quite strong enough to fight someone of Alex's stature. Damon glowered at him like a cornered animal, helpless and desperate. Between the both of them, Alex could feel Damon's erection, pulsing and hard, straining painfully against the zipper of his jeans. Damon must have noticed Alex noticed, because he immediately went into panic mode.

"You've got to be kidding me." Alex declared.

"Get off me!" Damon yelled, pushing at Alex.

"No." Alex shoved the back of Damon's head into the wall hard enough for him to wince.

"No, I get it now. This is what you wanted all along, isn't it? You can't have him, so why should anyone?" Alex frowned. "Seduce Alex and Graham will get jealous. Brilliant. You're a fucking arsehole, you know that?"

"Don't flatter yourself." Damon spat.

"Oh, really?" Alex narrowed his eyes, reaching down and cupping his hand over hard bulge in Damon's jeans. Damon squirmed underneath

him.

“Or maybe...” Alex raised an eyebrow, as if contemplating. “You really haven’t slept with Graham all this time, have you?”

Alex threw his head back, his eyes lighting up as he ran his fingers down Damon's chest. “Wow, you must be rabid by now.”

Involuntarily, Damon’s back arched against the wall, breath quickening as Alex's fingers stroked his erection through the fabric of his jeans. Damon tilted his head back, eyes closed and lips parted slightly as Alex kissed at his neck.

Without warning, Alex tightened his grip on Damon’s neck.

“Get on your knees.”

Damon lifted his chin, glaring back at him, his jaw clenched. His left eye had turned bloodshot, the skin surrounding it beginning to bruise pale yellow from where Alex hit him.

“Get on your knees.” Alex repeated, this time louder.

Damon stared down the bridge of his nose at Alex, holding his gaze with him uncomfortably long. Glacially slow, he bent his knees and sunk to the ground.

Wordlessly, Alex unclasped the button on his jeans.

“Open your mouth.”

Damon said nothing. Unblinking, cold blue eyes stared back up at him.

Alex’s thumb gently traced the outline of Damon’s lips, coaxing his mouth open. His red erection bounced as he freed it from his trousers, placing the head just in front of Damon’s lips.

“Open your mouth.”

Damon clenched his jaw, staring at up him with the same blue eyes Alex remembered that day from Goldsmiths.

Alex slapped him on the cheek.

“Open your mouth.”

Obeying the third time without question, Damon parted his lips and took Alex all the way into his mouth. Alex bit down on his upper lip as Damon's tongue touched his burning cock, doing his best to stifle back a moan. This was different. Alex was used to Graham going down on him. Graham was slow, delicate—he took his time. Damon, by contrast, was like fucking a pretty hate machine.

He dug his fingers into Damon's scalp, pulling at the soft blond hair as Damon kept going, pulling the foreskin back and lapping at Alex's cock with his large tongue. After a few minutes, Damon purposefully scraped his teeth against the head of his cock, a friendly reminder of their mutual animosity, and Alex winced.

Grabbing a bunch of Damon's hair, he pulled hard enough to hurt and pushed forcefully into Damon's mouth. "Don't do that again."

Wrapping his teeth underneath his lips, Damon continued, his right hand deftly stroking Alex as his left hand catered to his own erection over the fabric of his jeans.

After a while, his head began to bob in a rhythm that suited both of them, and when Damon stared up at him again with the same vicious blue eyes he was used to taking daggers from, Alex knew he couldn't last any longer.

His cock throbbed as he came into Damon's mouth, and Damon swallowed again— that slow, deliberate, languid swallow with his tongue that made Alex wonder why in God's name he'd never used his imagination to think about it before.

Without a word, Damon stood up, wiping his mouth with his sleeve.

"Not bad," Alex said breathlessly, zipping up his fly. "I can see why he fancies you."

"Piss off." Damon muttered underneath his breath.

"Gladly." Alex wrinkled his nose, snapping back to reality. He picked up his jacket from the couch.

"By the way, you really should tell Graham, you know." Alex pursed his lips, sticking his thumbs into the lapel of his jacket. "He's going to find out one way or the other."

"About what? This?" Damon frowned at him. "Stop being dense, Alex."

Alex glanced sideways at him, raising an eyebrow. “No, I know all about your little secret, Damon.”

Damon titled his head, narrowing his eyes. “I don’t know what you’re getting at.”

Alex circled his shoulder, turning away toward the door. “Well, he’s going to find out one way or the other. Thanks for the uh...” He paused at the doorframe, smiling wryly. “Well, you know.”

**

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

> Sort of obsessed with this photo from Blur Book of Graham, Alex, and Damon. Couldn't help but reference it for these chapters. Hope you enjoy. :)

When Damon returned to his room, dignity still shaken, he knew Graham would be there. Not because he had a sixth sense or anything, but because Dave had warned him he would be.

“Graham’s really upset about something,” Dave had said, pulling Damon aside in the hallway. “He wouldn’t tell me what. I’m guessing you know. He’s been...” Dave paused. “Drinking a lot more than normal. I told him to stay with you tonight.”

Dave, bless him, had successfully delivered Graham to Damon’s doorstep, where he sat crouched against the door, a quarter empty bottle of whiskey in hand.

“Oh, hello.” Graham looked up at him blearily.

“Hello, Graham.”

They hadn’t spoken much since Damon had left Graham’s house the morning after he’d slept over. Damon had left early enough that he didn’t have to explain what had happened the night before, but he figured Graham could piece most of it together and judge him either way. Although nothing had happened between them that night, the fact remained that Graham, while sober at least, wasn’t capable of holding a conversation with Damon that didn’t result in a panic attack or a fist fight.

“Dames, I’m really sorry about what happened—” He stopped, staring at Damon’s now-very-swollen and bruised face in the lamplight. “Jesus, what happened to your face?”

Damon held up his hand. “It’s nothing. I’m fine. Really.” He nodded toward the door. “Now come on in. It’s cold out here.”

Graham staggered into Damon’s room, collapsing on the bed. Damon took the bottle of whiskey out of Graham’s hands and set it down on the bedside table.

“Hey, I was going to have that.”

Damon shook his head. “I think you’ve had enough for tonight, Gra. You need to sleep.”

“No.” Graham pouted, furrowing his brow.

“Okay.” Damon rubbed his eyes, slouching on the bed next to him. “Well what do you want to do?”

“I don’t know. Watch the telly.”

Damon lit up. “Wait, I have an idea.” He pulled out the drawer of the bedside table, fishing out a deck of cards.

“Is this a drinking game?”

“Er, no.”

“Well I don’t want to play then.”

“Okay, it’s a drinking game, Graham.” Damon shuffled the cards. “You remember how to play rummy, don’t you?”

Graham nodded, eyelids half closed.

“Okay then, loser takes a shot. Fair enough?”

“Yeah, okay I guess.”

For the next hour, Damon did his best to play awfully, which was difficult task considering that Graham in his drunken state was already something of a terrible player. Within the hour, Damon had lost enough times to successfully empty almost the rest of the bottle of whiskey, which had been his intention. In the past, this sort of bait-and-switch game was the only way Damon had known how to keep Graham from drinking any more without upsetting him.

“You’re awful.” Graham slurred, shaking his head. “And I mean, truly, truly awful at this game.”

Damon blinked, his vision of Graham splitting and spinning in front of him. He wasn’t used to this amount of drinking—and he sure as hell couldn’t imagine how Graham was.

Graham furrowed his brow. “Are you okay?”

Damon held a hand to his head. “I’m fine. I’m great.” Damon reassured him, before leaning back too quickly and falling off the side of the bed. He cursed loudly as his head hit the floor.

He could hear Graham having a laughing fit above him. “You’re drunk.”

“No shit, Sherlock.” Damon groaned, picking himself up off the floor.

Laughing, Graham pulled Damon up toward the bed, embracing him in a huge hug.

Damon immediately tensed up. “Graham, don’t—”

Graham let go of him. “Sorry.”

Damon put an apologetic hand on Graham’s shoulder. “It’s okay.”

Graham looked away, staring down at his hands. “Can I ask you a question?”

Stretching his arms above his head, Damon leaned back onto the pillow. “Shoot.”

“Do you ever think about back when we were kids?”

“Yeah, I guess.” Damon frowned. “Sometimes. Why?”

“Do you remember when you had that wet dream about me?”

Damon covered his face with his hands, blushing. “I did *not* have a wet dream about you. I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Yes, you did. In your bedroom. The last day of summer before I left, you, Damon *fucking* Albarn had a wet dream about me. I heard you. I heard you moaning my name.”

Damon shook his head, a smile on his face and his cheeks flush red. “I think you’re drunk, Graham.”

“It’s still true.” Graham stared down at the bed, his fingers tracing patterns on Damon’s jeans. After a few moments of silence, he cleared his throat.

“Do you still have those...dreams about me?”

Damon closed his eyes, sighing. “Now that’s an unfair question, Gra.”

“Do you, or don’t you?”

Damon turned his head toward Graham, raising an eyebrow. “Where are you going with this?”

“I just want to know.”

Damon shook his head, staring down at his toes. Deliberating for what seemed like an eternity he finally said, “Yes, Graham. I still have those dreams about you from time to time. Are you happy now?”

“Almost.”

Damon shifted his body to face Graham, resting his chin on his palm.

“What are you getting at, anyway?”

Graham played with his hair, nervously curling and uncurling it around his finger. He bit his lip, avoiding eye contact with Damon. “Well, what if this was like one of those dreams?”

Damon sat up on his elbows. “What do you mean?”

“I mean…” Graham twirled his finger around the stitching of Damon’s jeans. “What if, for tonight, anything we did was like one of those dreams? We wouldn’t have to worry about, you know...”

“Graham.” Damon crooked his head sideways, staring straight at Graham. “Look at me.”

Bowing down, Graham scratched his nose, looking up at Damon through his lashes. Damon scanned his face for any sort of signal, any sort of indication that Graham was joking.

“You’re...serious?”

Graham nodded, biting his upper lip. It was those sort of eccentric mannerisms that were enough to drive drunk Damon over the edge and want to kiss him.

“Jesus, Graham, I'm so drunk.” Damon laughed, covering his face with his hands and shaking his head. “I don’t know...”

There was a moment of silence, and then Damon felt Graham slowly climb on top of him. Peeking through the gaps between his fingers, Damon peered up at Graham gazing down at him intently.

Leaning down, Graham gently moved Damon's hands out of his face and began to kiss him slowly. Out of instinct, Damon parted his lips, allowing Graham entrance. Pulling Damon forward, Graham peeled his shirt off of him.

"I want you." Graham breathed into his ear before biting at the nape of his neck. It was enough to make Damon's entire body feel like it was on fire.

Still straddling Damon, Graham reached his arms above his head and pulled his own shirt off. Damon watched in quiet admiration as he deftly unbuttoned the clasp on his jeans, stripping down to just his underwear. Underneath the tight elastic, Damon could see the outline of Graham's erection, and the sight alone was almost too much for him.

Graham began to unclasp Damon's pants, pulling them down and off him in one fell swoop. Leaning forward, Damon drew Graham down to kiss him, the other hand skillfully slipping underneath the hem of Graham's underwear and caressing him.

Despite all the alcohol, that small, familiar voice in Damon's head maintained itself, telling him this was a bad thing, that they should stop, lest something bad come of this. That they both knew that tomorrow things would not be better, they would just be worse.

"Graham, wait."

"Shut up."

Damon's mouth opened in surprise as Graham's mouth encompassed him entirely in one fell swoop.

"FUCK."

Graham moaned as he nursed Damon's half-hard erection into a burgeoning one. Alcohol be damned, he was good at his job.

"Fuck Gra..." Damon gasped, hands pulling at the sheets above his head. "Have you been learning new things from Alex?"

"Mmmhmm." Graham hummed from below him, nearly driving Damon into a frenzy.

Once Damon was sufficiently hard, Graham pulled back, licking his lips.

“Get on your knees.”

Tilting his head to the side, Damon narrowed his eyes. “What?”

“You heard me.”

“What are you—”

“Get on your knees, NOW.”

Damon stared back at Graham wide-eyed before moving into position.

“Okay.”

“You will do what I tell you to do.” Graham said firmly, pressing Damon down into the bed with more force than Damon was used to feeling. “Don’t question me again.”

“Okay.”

“Okay, *sir* .”

Damon swallowed slowly and nodded. “Yes, sir.”

Eyes looking straight ahead, Damon could hear Graham spitting into his hand behind him. He closed his eyes, suddenly remembering what it felt like to have Alex pinning him against the wall, helpless. Biting his tongue in anticipation, Damon moved to touch himself.

Graham immediately hit him, his hand leaving a stinging red mark on Damon’s backside.

“Do not touch yourself unless I tell you to.”

Damon bit back a moan, feeling himself getting harder at just the thought of Graham taking advantage of him, of being helpless.

He held his breath as Graham entered him. The sensation was painful, too painful, and Graham was not taking his time. For whatever reason, he was taking him rough, hard, and without any regard for this being his first time.

Damon bit down on his lower lip, wincing in pain as Graham forced himself all the way inside. He struggled against Graham, trying to push him off but to no avail. Graham was stronger than he looked, and being above him made it easier for Graham to pin him down.

He felt small, powerless. He winced, feeling Graham pull out and then in again. After a minute or so the pain started to dissipate, replaced instead with pleasure. He reached down to touch himself, and Graham hit him again, harder this time.

“I told you not to not to do that.”

“Yes, sir. I’m sorry, sir.”

Graham pushed into him, rougher this time, and Damon moaned Graham’s name so loud he knew there was no way Dave wouldn’t have heard them in the neighboring room. He wasn’t going to last long through this.

Graham began to quicken his pace and soon Damon couldn’t see anything but stars, his body pinned against the bed helplessly as Graham fucked him. He heard Graham moan behind him as he came, collapsing onto his back, his whole body shaken and stricken with sweat. Damon came not soon after, spilling on to the sheets and crumbling into shakey post-coital ball. Heaving, Graham collapsed next to him.

Damon stared up at the ceiling, breathless. “What...was that?”

Skin still covered in sweat, Graham pulled away from Damon’s embrace and sat up on the bed. His hand reached for a cigarette on the bedside table and stuck it between his lips.

“Graham...” Damon sat up on the bed. “Graham?”

Lighting his cigarette, Graham looked at him out of the corner of his eye.

“What?”

“What?” Damon repeated, wide-eyed. “What was... *that* ? *That* came out of left field. You’ve never done, well, I mean, you know...”

Still holding his cigarette, Graham crossed his arms, perching his free hand on his opposite knee. He nervously bit at his nails.

“Did you and Alex fuck tonight?” Graham asked very matter-of-factly.

Damon stared back, his face blank. “What?”

“I said, did you and Alex—”

“No, I heard you.” Damon opened his mouth to speak, but stopped. “Graham, no—”

“Don’t lie to me, Damon.” Graham interrupted, the free fingers of his cigarette hand starting to anxiously tap against his knee.

Damon looked away. He pressed his hair back with both hands.

“Graham, we—” Damon hesitated. “…Yes, I guess. Sort of. I don’t know if you would call it—”

“Don’t.” Graham shook his head, his entire body tensing up. “Just don’t.”

“Graham, we didn’t have sex, we just—”

“He gave you a black eye and you gave him a blow job.” Graham interrupted.

Damon stared back at Graham, agape.

“How did you—”

“I saw you. There. With him.” Graham refused to look at him.

“You were watching the whole time?”

Graham nodded slowly, still avoiding eye contact. He took a long drag on his cigarette, and the way the cherry light burned in the dark made Damon want to snatch it out of his hand and press it into his own skin. Suddenly, everything Graham had done tonight, including the switching of roles, made sense. Of course. He was jealous.

Lifting his chin to take another drag, Graham tapped his fingers against his knee.

“So, do you want Alex then?”

“…No.”

“I don’t believe you.”

“Graham, look at me.” Damon laid his hand on Graham’s shoulder. “I don’t want Alex.”

Damon lifted Graham’s chin up. Round brown eyes stared back at him, cautious, calculating.

Damon shook his head. “I want you. I only want you. You are only person I’ve wanted this whole time. *Believe* me.”

Graham shook Damon off him, looking away again.

“I’m sorry.” Damon said with a straight mouth.

“Was it true, what Alex said?”

“What do you mean?”

“Alex said you only wanted him because you needed something...someone different.”

Damon shook his head, covering his face with his hands.

“Look, Graham, I…” He laughed. “I haven’t been with anyone since Justine—” Damon stopped, seeing the pain on the Graham’s face.

“It’s been awhile since I’ve done anything with anyone, and…. it’s not a good excuse, but, I mean.” Damon looked down at his hands. “I didn’t want to hurt you again, especially not after what happened—”

“—So you decided to give Alex a blowjob.”

“Well, when you say it like that, I mean yeah, it sounds bad.”

“It sounds terrible.” Graham laughed, glancing over his shoulder at him, and for a moment Damon thought he saw a flicker of hope.

Graham rolled his cigarette between his fingers, pressing his lips together. He stared off into the darkness. “He’s good though, yeah? Alex, I mean.”

Frowning slightly, Damon pinched his nose. “I fucking hate him, but yes. I have to admit that.”

“I know, I was surprised the first time too.” Graham smiled, and Damon felt a sort of melancholy rip through him.

Damon crossed his arms and cleared his throat. “When did you first…” Damon trailed off, not wanting to say it out loud.

“Four years ago.”

“But I thought—”

“College?” Graham shook his head, extinguishing his cigarette on the bedside ashtray. “No. I know, I thought it would have happened back then too.”

Graham shifted to face him.

“I think he didn’t do anything because he met you, and he could tell, you know, about us.” Graham paused, pressing his lips together into a slight frown. “Although, admittedly he didn’t tell me that until years later. At the time I just thought you were a tosser who never visited me when you got back into town.”

Damon grimaced. “Yeah, well… that’s the half-truth I guess.”

Graham reached for another cigarette, his hands shaking as he did so. It was 4am and the alcohol withdrawal was finally beginning to kick in for him. He swallowed slowly, pressing the cigarette to his lips. “Why are we such a mess, Dames?”

Damon tilted his head, resting on the palm of his hand as he made eye contact with Graham. “I don’t know.”

Graham swallowed, staring up at the ceiling. “I won’t be able to sleep tonight.”

Damon grabbed one of Graham’s shaking hands, pulling it toward his heart. “Come ‘ere.” He kissed Graham on the cheek, pulling him down toward the bed. He curled his arms around Graham’s waist, head tucked into his shoulder, and held him until Graham stopped shaking and fell asleep.

**

When Damon woke up the next day, his head was spinning still. Sitting up, he felt his stomach churn with the familiar sensation of a hangover. Rubbing his eyes, he stared into space, blinking. The bed next to him was empty, cold—Graham was nowhere to be seen.

Fighting back nausea, he climbed out of bed and staggered toward the bathroom. Blinking blearily, he stuck his hands into his travel bag, rummaging around for something. After a minute or so of not finding what he was looking for he stopped, cursing underneath his breath. Spinning around to head back into the bedroom, he almost jumped as he noticed Graham standing in the doorway.

“Looking for this?” Graham raised an eyebrow, holding up a

prescription painkiller bottle in front of him.

Damon's mouth dropped open.

"That's what I thought." Graham said quietly.

"Graham, listen, it's not what you think—"

"Isn't it?" Graham looked down at the bottle, frowning. "This has my name on it. Funny, because I found it in *your* bag. Why would my pills be in your bag, Damon?"

"Graham," Damon stammered. "It's complicated, okay? I didn't want to tell you."

"Yes, it is complicated." Graham retorted, clenching his jaw. "You've been lying to me again. You haven't been clean at all, have you? You're a fucking liar." Graham narrowed his eyes at him. "And to think, the audacity of you stealing this from me, just to get high—"

"Graham, that's not how it was. I-I wasn't taking them, okay?" Damon faltered, raising his voice. He ran a hand over his scalp, pressing his hair back.

"I was worried about you. I didn't want you…" Damon stopped, waving at something invisible in the air. "Going off and trying to kill yourself again. Okay? I'm telling you the truth."

Graham lowered his eyebrows, squinting at him. "That's not what Alex said."

"Alex?" A wave of realization passed over Damon's face. Suddenly, he understood what Alex had been trying to allude to. He must have found the pills when he'd been putting the headphones back into his bag last night.

" *Alex.* Oh, *fucking* Alex."

Damon shook his head. "Alex doesn't know shit. He's lying to you. This is all just a part of his agenda, Graham. He wants you all to himself, he doesn't want me anywhere near you."

"Is that why you fucked him then?" Graham shouted, and Damon flinched.

Damon buried his face in his hands. "Graham, please. I don't want to do this."

Graham scrunched up his nose, his eyes ringed with red. “I don’t believe either one of you.” He said quietly. “Both of you are lying bastards.”

He shoved the bottle of pills into Damon’s hands. “Here, you can have them. And you can have him all to yourself too.”

Eyes watering, Graham stormed out of the room, slamming the door shut behind him.

**

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

> Thank you so much for your patience, kudos, and comments. <3 <3 The end is near, I promise. ;) This story will end on modern Gramon, but there will be a few big time jumps after this chapter, so not too many more chapters. I'm trying to keep things based in actual events as much as possible which is why it's taking longer, but I apologize if they're a bit off or changed for dramatic effect (read: gayness). Also, I'm really sorry about this trash ship but actual history is stranger than fiction, yeah?
>
> Also, here's an interview I based this chapter on, and a drawing I made while doing "research"/watching Charts of Darkness. :P

Graham straightened his back as he entered the studio. He kept his eyes downcast as he reached for his guitar strap and slung it over his shoulder. He was late, but he knew it didn't matter.

"Cor, Graham." Alex touched the small of his back as he passed, and Graham shivered.

"Good to see you." Alex raised an eyebrow. "It's been a while."

Graham peeked up through his eyelids, quietly observing Damon from the other side of the room. "Yeah, it has."

"Graham." Damon acknowledged him, his mouth set in a straight line. "Glad you could join us."

Graham looked toward Alex, and Alex shrugged his shoulders as though to say, *you know how he is.*

"What new songs have you got?"

Graham chewed on his lower lip, biting at his thumb. Damon's eyes drove into him as though he could read his mind.

Who else have you been fucking?

"I've got a couple of ideas, I guess."

"Well?" Damon raised his eyebrows. "Let us hear it."

Graham looked nervously toward Alex, then looked back at Damon. He scratched the back of his head.

“Right.” Sticking his pick between his lips, he quickly tuned his guitar and began to strum out some chords. After a minute or so, Damon stopped him.

“Are there lyrics?”

Graham blinked, pushing his glasses up his nose. “Er, yeah.”

Damon tilted his head, looking at him sideways. “Well, let’s hear them.”

“Damon,” Graham laughed nervously. “You know I’m no singer—“

“You can sing fine.” Damon interjected. “Let us hear it.”

“Damon—” Alex piped in. Everyone in the room seemed to be now awkwardly cognizant of Damon’s bullying.

“Leave it. It’s okay. The song sounds good. We’ll figure out the lyrics later.” Alex stuck his chin out as though to make a point. “...Like we always do.”

Damon frowned, pressing his lips together. “Right. Good work, Graham. Let’s take a break and then we’ll be back in an hour.”

Graham slid his guitar off, his shoulders slumping. He gave Alex a sideways glance. “Thanks.”

“No problem.” Alex replied with a tight-lipped smile. He crossed his arms, leaning in toward Graham. “So…where exactly have you been all this time?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, no calls, no letters, no…” Alex narrowed his eyes. “Anything, really. You’ve been a ghost for what, a year?”

Graham briefly touched his nose, looking away. “I’m sorry, Alex. I just…” Graham shrugged. “I don’t know.”

“Okay…” Alex lowered his eyebrows, looking away. “I guess I’ll see you in an hour then, Gra.”

Watching Alex leave the recording booth, Graham unclenched his fist,

red marks on his skin where his guitar pick inside his hand had dug into his palm. He walked into the lobby of the studio, flipping the pick over between his fingers. He spotted Damon out of the corner of his eye, oblivious, his head buried in a composition notebook.

Alex walked past him, giving Graham a sideways glance before touching Damon on the shoulder. “Hey Dames, I’m headed to Tesco for a pack, you need anything?”

Damon looked up from his notebook, smiling. “No, thanks.”

Graham crossed his arms and looked away, pretending to look at the frames on the walls. Something had to be going on between them, Graham was certain of it.

“Couch is free.” Damon said, slicing through the awkward silence. He patted at the seat next to him.

Graham cleared his throat, hesitating. “It’s okay—“ He stopped, noticing Damon’s facial muscles tighten up. “Sure.” He fake-smiled, sitting down next to Damon on the couch and crossing his legs.

“So how have you—” They both said at the same time.

Graham cleared his throat again, nodding. “How have you been?”

“Good.”

“Good.”

Graham rubbed at the nape of his neck, clearly uncomfortable.

Seemingly unperturbed, Damon looked back down at his notebook, crossed and then uncrossed his legs.

For the past year, there had been nothing but radio silence between them. All four of them have moved to different areas of the city, sequestered and divided by their choice of friends and drugs and self-indulgent ideas of what fame felt like these days.

“I heard—I mean I read that someone posted your phone number. In the paper.” Graham squeaked quietly. He added, “That must have been awful.”

Damon looked off. His face was a few days unshaven, his clothes unflatteringly baggy, and it was obvious that it had been some time since he’d had a haircut.

Graham pulled at the tufts of hair around his ears, breaking eye contact.

Damon stared down at the page in front of him, tapping his pen against his notebook. “Hmm?”

“I said your number—”

“Oh, yeah.” Damon looked up briefly, settling back into the couch. “Awful.”

“Sounds like it. Right. Well.” Graham stood up, dusting his shirt off with his hands. “I think I’m going to go have a cig.”

To his dismay, Damon didn’t acknowledge him leave, his eyes still glued to the page.

This was always how it was with Damon, he never changed. During their salad days, Graham had once critiqued one of Damon’s acting performances a little too honestly and afterward Damon had refused to talk to him for an entire week. Damon didn’t like showing weakness or subscribing to vulnerability in the face of strife, it didn’t suit him. Thankfully for the band it was also one of the things that made him an excellent frontman.

When Graham exited the studio into the adjacent alleyway, he noticed Alex leaning up against the brick wall, his legs kicked out in front of him.

“Hello, Gra.”

“I thought you left.”

“No.” Alex took a drag between his fingers, shaking his head. He nodded toward the door. “It was just an excuse to get out of that hell hole.”

“Oh.” Graham nodded. He tried a desperate attempt at small talk. “So, what have you been up to…”

“Oh, lots.” Alex’s raised his eyebrows, his eyes lighting up. “London is a crazy place, you know.”

There was an awkward moment of silence and then Alex said, “So I heard you had a falling out with Damon.”

“Yeah.” Graham shot him a tight-lipped smile. “Who told you that?”

“Oh, a little birdie.” Alex talked through his lips, cigarette dangling from his mouth. “I thought you would at least call me, you know.” Graham detected a hint of pain in Alex’s voice.

“I’m sorry.” Graham looked away, sticking his hands in his pockets. “I just thought… I don’t know what I think anymore.”

Alex turned to face him, holding his cigarette delicately between two fingers.

“You think too much, you know.” Alex lifted Graham’s chin with his finger, forcing him to make eye contact. “You really do.”

Graham looked down the bridge of his nose at Alex, crinkling his face up. “I’m sorry.”

“Stop saying you’re sorry. You sound like a broken record.”

Graham said nothing, looking off into the distance. After a moment or two, he cleared his throat. “So is he a better shag than me?”

“What are you talking about?”

“Damon.” Graham clenched his jaw.

Alex shook his head, narrowing his eyes. “What the hell are you talking about—“

“Don’t bullshit me, Alex. I know what happened on the last tour. You both have been going on for months now, it’s obvious.”

“Oh Jesus Christ, Graham, *come on* .” Alex’s shoulders collapsed. “You really think that Damon and I have been hooking up?

Graham crossed his arms and looked down at his shoes.

“ *God,* no. I can’t stand that man.” Alex shook his head and scrunched his nose up. “I don’t how you do.”

“But I saw both of you—“

“Once, Graham. One time I was with him.” Alex narrowed his eyes, looking down at him. “And it wasn’t much. I’ve done worse things on first dates with proper ladies. I wouldn’t exactly call it an affair.”

Alex scrunched up his face in disgust. He pinched his cigarette between his fingers and tossed it to the ground. “Ew. No. Damon’s

definitely with someone but it's not me."

Graham looked at Alex blankly, his face sheet white.

"What?"

"You don't know, really?" Alex looked at him, dumbfounded. "It's been all over the papers. Damon moved into a flat with someone. The tabloids are going crazy speculating about it. That's why he's been an exceptionally miserable tosser to be around lately."

"Who is it?" Graham gaped at him, mouth open.

"I don't know." Alex shrugged. "I didn't care to ask."

"Justine?"

Alex shook his head. "No, definitely not. The tabloids would have been all over that in seconds. This is someone new."

Graham's mouth hung open, as though he were seemingly unable to process the information he was just given.

"I...I don't understand."

Alex shot him a look of pity.

"People move on, Graham." Alex raised his eyebrows. "You were gone, for a year. Poof." Alex waved his hand in the air. "Nowhere to be seen. Completely fucked off. Is it really that surprising that he found someone else?"

Graham's chest began to heave. "I have to go. I'm sorry."

Alex frowned at him. "You just got here."

"No, I have to go to the bathroom." Saying nothing else to Alex, Graham made a beeline for the studio entrance. He felt his heart beat rapidly against his chest, his throat beginning to tighten up. He held his breath as he peeled open to the door to the bathroom stall, trying not to hyperventilate. He sat down on the cold tile, arms clutched at his sides. Here came the panic again.

Suddenly, he no longer wanted to move, to go anywhere. He couldn't fathom the idea of going back into the studio to face Damon, to see his face and know that— *no* .

He tried to push the thought away. He tried to push a thousand thoughts about Damon being with someone else, *fucking* someone else, away. Leaning against the bathroom stall, he sunk his head into his shoulder and closed his eyes, listening to only the sound of his ragged breathing.

When he woke again, the bathroom was completely pitch black. He rubbed his eyes, feeling dizzy as he pushed himself up off the bathroom floor. He held a hand to his head as he tried to remember how he'd gotten there, and how long he must have slept. He needed a drink. Sooner than later.

Pushing the bathroom door open with a rusty squeak, he peered out into the studio lobby. It must have been late, the windows outside were completely dark.

He heard someone clear their throat and he nearly jumped out of his skin.

"Who is that?"

"It's me." Graham recognized Damon's deep voice coming from the same area on the couch he'd seen him last. A small table lamp illuminated Damon's face, casting foreboding shadows over his features.

"What are you doing here this—?"

"We were looking for you." Damon interrupted. "You never came back to practice."

"I'm sorry," Graham apologized for what felt like the thousandth time that day. "I...I passed out."

"Were you drinking?" Damon made it sound more like a statement than a question.

"No." Graham stuttered, his face turning red. "I wasn't."

"Come here."

Graham crossed his arms, hesitating. After a moment or two he walked toward the couch and sat down.

Glancing sideways, he observed at Damon in the lamplight. He looked tired. The harsh shadows from the tableside lamp did his friend little

justice. Age lines, barely visible a year ago, were now quickly creeping up at the corners of his eyes like some karmic debt for the past few years of endless albums and touring.

“What are you working on?” Graham peered down at Damon’s notebook. It was full of drawings and notes. He furrowed his brow, recognizing the style of one of the sketches. “Wait, I recognize that, is that Jamie Hew—”

“It’s nothing.” Damon sighed, snapping his notebook closed. “It’s just some rubbish.”

Graham looked back at him, bewildered. “Whoa. Sorry.”

“It’s okay. I’m sorry, I’m a little…edgy right now.” Damon circled his shoulders and rubbed the back of his neck. He took a deep breath. “Were you…were you in there the whole time?” He nodded toward the bathroom.

“Yeah.”

Graham watched quietly as Damon wrung his hands together in the sort of way Graham always would, and sniffed loudly as though he had a cold.

“Are you okay?”

Damon briefly touched his nose. “Yeah, I’m fine. Just getting over something.”

Graham touched Damon’s hand—it was ice cold and sweaty. Damon immediately recoiled, withdrawing his hands, as though he’d just touched a hot oven. Having turned, Graham now noticed the wet beads of sweat dripping down Damon’s forehead and suddenly it all made sense.

Saying nothing, Graham stood up, walked across the room and opened his bag. Pulling something indiscernible out, he walked back to the couch and sat down. Without a word he unscrewed the top off a bottle of spirits, took a long swig, and offered it to Damon.

Damon looked at the bottle apprehensively, his hands shaking. He took the bottle from him. “Thanks.”

Damon tipped his head back, swallowing a large gulp and looking away toward the wall.

After a moment of silence, Damon finally spoke. “No one can know about this.”

Graham nodded invisibly in the darkness.

“I couldn’t sleep.” Damon inhaled and then breathed out slowly. “I haven’t been able to sleep.”

“How long have you been off it?” Graham asked quietly.

Damon swallowed. “A week.”

Damon motioned for Graham to hand him the bottle again and Graham obliged.

“Nothing I do…” Damon trailed off, pressing the bottle to his lips. “Distracts me long enough.”

“Not even—” Graham began, wanting to say ‘your new roommate’ but then cut himself short, realizing it would be too harsh.

“What?”

“Nevermind. Nothing.”

A tenseness sat between them for a few moments before Damon cleared his throat.

“I didn’t take your pills, Graham.” Damon looked away into the distance, his shoulders slumping. “I took them from your house but I didn’t *take* them.” He corrected himself.

Graham stared down at his shoes.

“I needed you to not...” Damon paused, touching his nose. “Go away again.”

“But I did.”

“You did.”

“I’m sorry.” Graham felt like he was saying sorry a lot these days.

“You know, you never even asked me about how I felt.”

“About what?”

“About Justine.” Damon glared at Graham out of the corner of his eye. “After you ended up at the hospital, I knew I couldn’t—”

Damon stopped, taking a deep breath. “I called her and told her it was over. I thought it was what you wanted.”

Graham felt his heart rip slowly inside his chest.

“And then you left.” Damon paused, the muscles in his face tightening. “I needed you and then you just *pissed off*.”

Damon stared down at the bottle between his hands. “Like you always do.”

Graham bit at his bottom lip, palms clutched his elbows. He wrung his hands, looking at Damon sideways. He watched as a bead of sweat dripped off of Damon’s forehead onto his nose. He reached out to touch Damon’s shoulder, but Damon refused to look at him.

“I’m sorry.” He said again, looking into Damon’s eyes. “I really am.”

Damon raised his eyebrows, picking himself up off the couch. “I should really head home.” He staggered sideways, placing his hand on the wall.

“Dames.”

Graham reached out to touch Damon’s hand.

“I’m fine.”

Damon refused to look at him. Damon took a couple shaky steps and fell forward. Graham immediately jumped up from the couch, trying to catch him.

Graham grabbed Damon’s arm, eyes wide with concern. Damon’s arms were shaking underneath his grip, cold as ice.

“… *Fuck* .” Damon covered his face with his hands. “I can’t go home like this.”

Graham opened his mouth to ask why it mattered but then stopped, opting instead to not open that can of worms quite yet.

Standing up, Damon motioned for Graham to hand him the bottle of liquor again. Throwing his head back he finished off the rest of it and twisted his face up in disgust.

“Ugh. I don’t know how you drink this straight.”

Graham moved to face Damon, their hands still touching. Damon stared back at him with glassy, red-rimmed eyes, clearly spent from an unending string of sleepless nights. Leaning in, Graham kissed him, his free hand reaching underneath the hem of Damon’s shirt and caressing an exposed hip bone.

To his dismay, Damon was surprisingly non-reactive, and when Graham pulled back to see what was wrong Damon returned his gaze with lifeless eyes.

Desperate, Graham reached between Damon’s legs, stroking him through the fabric of his jeans. Damon was half-hard, not at all what Graham had hoped for, but he would take what he could get right now. Getting down on his knees, Graham unclasped the buttons on Damon’s jeans. He hooked his finger tips underneath the waistband of Damon’s black briefs, taking care to remove his half-hard erection and expertly run the tip of his tongue down the length of it. Damon’s cock greeted him with a pulsing welcome, and within a minute or so, Damon was fully erect.

Licking his lips, Graham rose from his knees and Damon immediately grabbed him by the hips. Saying nothing, he spun Graham around, pinning him against the wall. His hands fumbled with Graham’s zipper before roughly pulling his pants down.

“No, not here.” Damon looked up at the corners of the room, as though he were paranoid that they might be seen. “Come on.”

Damon grabbed his hand, pulling both of them into the recording studio and shutting the door behind them. Damon strengthened his grip on Graham’s arm, pushing him against the recording panel and doubling him over.

Graham yelled out in surprise, and Damon tightened his grip even more. “Ah, that hurts—”

Feeling more exposed and uncomfortable than normal, Graham turned his neck to kiss Damon. Practically flinching, Damon moved his head out of the way. Graham lowered his brow, a hurt look on his face.

Damon stared back at him wordlessly. “What?”

Graham moved to touch him again and Damon recoiled.

“What’s wrong?”

Damon looked back at him through half-lidded eyes. “Isn’t this what you want?” He looked away and then back again. “For me to just fuck you?”

Graham stared back at him, his mouth agape. His head seemed to be torn between his hurt and his need to prove something.

Graham moved in to kiss him again and Damon turned his cheek. “Let’s not…”

Graham felt his heart rip into two pieces. Bent over, his body sank against the recording monitor, He pressed his fingertips into the wood finish. If this was all they had left, then he would take it.

Damon pushed into him and Graham bit his bottom lip, arching his back up to meet him. He sunk his teeth into his own arm, biting back a moan, content that he could still feel a physical pain other than this emotional one.

Damon pushed forward into him even more roughly and Graham cried out, the jagged buttons on the recording table digging painfully into his palms.

“Damon, wait—”

Reaching his arms behind him, Graham grabbed at Damon’s forearms and Damon pushed him away, pinning his hands to the table instead. The buttons on the monitor now felt like glass underneath his hands. Graham wanted nothing more than to move, to scream out in pain, but he couldn’t. He bit back a moan as Damon ground against him in short, fast movements, hot breath against his ear. In the darkness they could barely see one another. He felt the fingers of Damon’s right hand close around his neck.

Fingernails digging into his hips, Damon pushed himself into Graham one last time, shuddering with relief as he came. Without a word, he pulled out almost immediately, tugging up his zipper and leaving Graham still exposed, his erection painfully trapped and unfulfilled between his body and the recording table. Graham felt the blood rush from his cock to his face as he pulled up his jeans, feeling more used than wanted. Graham fingertips lightly caressed his adam’s apple, gingerly touching the place where Damon had has held him moments ago.

Damon looked up at him, his face almost entirely cast in shadow.

“Do you have a ride home?”

Graham shook his head no.

Damon looked at his watch. “You’re not going to be able to get a cab to Camden this late.”

Graham shifted his weight from one foot to another. He felt his cock twitch, still hard, between his legs.

Damon rubbed the stubble on his face and sighed. “I have a guest bed.” Damon looked at him from head to toe, and for a second Graham felt as though he were still naked. Graham crossed his arms, clutching his elbows with his hands.

“You can wash up there and we can come back here tomorrow morning for practice.”

Graham nodded, looking up at Damon cautiously.

“Sure.”

A little bit of melancholy ripped through his heart at the way Damon looked at him, without love, without pity. He picked his bag up off the floor and followed Damon out of the studio.

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Graham woke up to the bright morning sun forcing its way through his eyelids, his head pounding like a jackhammer. The hangovers were getting perpetually worse as time went on, but he was used to it by now. He had a routine—one Aspirin, two cups of strong coffee and he’d be fine by 11. He rubbed at his eyes, sitting up in bed. Still waiting for his eyes to adjust, he blindedly searched the bedside stand for his glasses.

Peering through his specs he padded toward the bathroom, hands clamoring at the door frame. He looked at himself in the mirror, jagged red lines indented on the pale skin of his chest where he’d slept. He shivered at the cold linoleum beneath his feet, running toward the shower faucet and turning it on. Sighing with relief, he

stepped into the warm water and shut the door behind him.

Blindly, he reached for the soap and began to wash himself. A few solid minutes passed before he heard the sound of the shower door opening behind him and he felt two warm arms wrap themselves around his waist. Eyes closed, he leaned backward into the embrace.

“Cor, you came home late last night.”

Graham didn’t recognize the voice. His eyes snapped open. He pulled away, looking back to see another bewildered man who looked just as horrified to see him. Graham yelled out involuntarily, immediately jumping out of the shower and reaching for the nearest towel to cover himself. His wet feet slipped out ungracefully from the linoleum floor beneath him. He fell sideways into the towel rack, hitting his head with a loud thwack and the whole world went black.

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Graham woke up to the sensation of something cold pressed against his forehead. Blinking blearily, he looked up to see Damon hunched over him, holding a cold compress.

“Are you okay?”

A sharp pain jutted through Graham’s skull and he winced.

“You hit that towel rack pretty hard.” Damon frowned.

“It hit me.” Graham mumbled.

Damon furrowed his brows. “What?”

“Nothing.”

“Oh my god, is he alive?” Graham heard someone pipe up from behind Damon, and Graham’s heart sank with the realization that he had not, in fact, been having a nightmare. The same man’s face he recalled from the shower appeared above him, peering down. It was the same man Graham remembered making friends with years ago in college, on another awkward occasion, when he’d ruined one of his favorite jumpers...among other things.

Damon looked down at Graham quizzically. “I don’t know, are you okay?”

“You took quite the fall in there.” Jamie Hewlett’s face was full of concern. “Sorry I gave you such a stir. It’s funny though, I thought you were—”

Damon non-discreetly elbowed Jamie in the side, and Jamie winced.

Graham narrowed his eyes at both of them. “G’off me.”

He pushed Damon’s motherly touch away, sitting up on the bed. The blanket covering him fell down below his shoulders and both Damon and Jamie’s gaze immediately traveled to his translucent white chest. Panicking, he pulled up the blanket to cover himself.

Graham’s eyes widened into large discs. “I need to talk to Damon.”

There was a brief pause of awkwardness.

“Alone , please.”

Damon nodded, motioning for Jamie to leave, and who looked as though he were about to burst out laughing.

Damon shook his head. “I’m sorry. That’s Jamie, he’s just—”

“I know who he is.”

Damon smiled as though confused. “What?”

“I introduced him to you, you tosser. In college. Talented comic book artist whose work I liked? Yeah. Jamie *fucking* Hewlett. You saw us in a bathroom together? He thought you were a right well cunt at the time.”

Damon rubbed the nape of his neck, looking down at the floor.

“Oh, and he also stole my girlfriend. Thanks for remembering.” Graham pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose. “I see you two are getting along nicely now.”

“Right.” Damon rubbed at the stubble on his chin. “Forgot about that. The girlfriend thing I mean...”

“Yeah, some great friend you are.” Graham pressed his lips together, searching around for his t-shirt.

Damon handed him his folded clothes, his eyes downcast. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean for you to find out this way.”

“Find out about what? That you have a roommate?” Graham screwed up his face. “Jesus Christ, Damon.”

Damon opened his mouth as though to speak, but nothing came out. He nodded, looking down at the floor. “Right. Roommate.”

Another sharp pain jutted through Graham’s skull like lightning. “Ugh!” He held a hand to his head.

Damon caught him in his arms, pulling him toward the bed. He raised his eyebrows. “You need to sit down.” He handed him the cold compress. “Here, hold this on your head. It’ll keep the swelling down. I’ll be back, I’m going to grab some ibuprofen.”

Watching Damon leave, Graham looked up to see Jamie standing in the doorway looking at him, his arms folded.

“What are you starin’ at?” Graham asked bitterly.

Jamie remained quiet, crossing the room and sitting down on the bed next to him. Graham felt the air around his body repel against Jamie’s like an opposing magnet.

Graham glared at him from underneath his ice pack. “What? Did you hear— *oh Christ* .” He shook his head. “Well...it’s fucking true.”

“I wasn’t trying to take Jane away from you, you know. I thought you two were broken up at the time. She didn’t tell me.” Jamie half-frowned, shrugging. “I’m sorry, mate.”

“I’m not your *mate* .” Graham replied bitingly, glaring down at his shoes.

A few awkward moments passed and Graham cleared his throat.

“So now what, you’re taking my best friend too?”

“It’s not like that.”

Graham’s face tightened. He reached into his back pocket for a cigarette. “Yeah, well, it sure looks like it.”

Both of them perked up as Damon re-entered the room. Damon looked back and forth between them apprehensively. He handed Graham a

couple of white pills and a glass of water.

“Jamie, why don’t you go downstairs and have breakfast, yeah?” Damon motioned toward the door.

Jamie slapped his thighs, standing up. “Sounds like a great idea.” He shot Damon a tight-lipped smile, before exiting the bedroom.

Graham held a thumb to his head, massaging his right temple. “So that’s who you’ve been fucking this whole time, eh?”

Damon clenched his jaw, his eyes instant laser beams.

“So, do you fuck him, or does he hold you down and fuck you like a girl, cause that’s how you like it these days?”

Damon threw his hands up, rolling his eyes as hard as he could muster. “For Chrissakes, Graham. You are such a fucking child, you know that?”

Graham lifted his chin, taking a long draw on his cigarette. He looked up at Damon through narrowed eyes.

Damon jutted his chin out, pointing at something invisible. “You were gone for a year, Graham. A YEAR. You never called or wrote anything to me.”

Damon snatched the cigarette from Graham’s mouth, and Graham screwed up his face. “Oh, piss off.” He mumbled, sticking the fag between his own lips.

He took a long pull, looking up at the ceiling. “Jesus, for all I knew you were fucking someone else too.”

“Well, I wasn’t.”

Damon narrowed his eyes, his lips pursed. He looked away. “Well, then I’m sorry you had to find out like this.”

“How did you find him anyway? Digging through my black book of old fucks?” Graham removed the cold press from his forehead, wincing. “I thought he hated you.”

Damon threw him the finger. “Not that it’s any of your business, but Jane broke up with him and he needed a place to stay. I suppose that news will make you happy.”

“Not really.”

“Well, it’s not like it’s been easy living alone, okay? Thanks for giving a shit.”

Graham kicked at the floor with the tip of his shoe. “So now what, you’re a couple?”

“No. Christ.” Damon scrunched up his nose. “It’s not like that.”

“Oh, really?” Graham raised his eyebrows. “Is that why he touched me in the shower, thinking I was you?”

Graham pressed his lips together. “I wonder, how would he feel if I told him you fucked me last night? Does he know you’re a lying cheat?”

Graham moved to stand up and Damon pressed a hand to his chest. “Graham. Don’t. Please.”

Damon ran a hand through his scalp, crushing his cigarette between two fingers. “It’s complicated, okay? More complicated than you’re making it out to be.”

Graham stared past Damon’s face into the wall. Lifting his eyebrows, he took a long inhale. “Well, I think I’ve heard enough for today. I’m going to go.”

Graham moved to leave and Damon grabbed him by the arm with the same intensity he had last night.

“Graham, stop. Let’s talk about this for once.”

“Talk about what? What’s left to talk about?”

“I just want us to be friends, Graham. Like we used to be.”

“Friends?” Graham laughed as though just the idea itself were absurd. “I don’t think you understand what a friend is, Damon. Friends don’t fuck each other.”

Graham shook his head. “Just piss off.” He muttered, shaking Damon’s grip off of him and walking out the door.

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Standing across the street from Damon’s doorstep, Graham punched a

familiar number into the phone box.

“Hello?”

“Hey.”

“Who’s this?” Alex’s gravelly voice greeted him on the other end.

“It’s Graham.”

“Oh.” There was pause and then what sounded like Alex repositioning the phone cord. “What’s going on?”

“Nothing. I just…” Graham trailed off, shifting his weight from one foot to the other. “Just wondering if I could come over.”

“Oh…” Alex’s voice drawled as though he were pre-occupied. “Um, well. I’m sort of tied up at the moment.”

“With who?”

Graham heard multiple feminine voices giggling on the other end of the receiver. “Look, I’ll call you back, yeah?”

“Wait.” Graham held his breath, chewing on his lip. He added, “Sorry, never mind.”

Alex exhaled loudly into the receiver. “Oh Jesus. It’s Damon, isn’t it?”

Graham silent response was enough to get the point across.

“You went over to his house, didn’t you?” Alex sighed. “Dammit, Graham. You’re some sort of masochist, I swear to God.”

He heard Alex shift the phone around again. “Look...I’ll call you later, okay? Don’t do anything stupid.”

Saying nothing more, Graham hung up the phone. He reached into his bag, pulling out a cigarette with shaky hands. Squinting into the sun, he looked up at Damon’s window.

He remembered the feeling of Jamie’s teeth on his neck, and the way he’d seduced him so expertly that, for a few weeks following, almost decided to give up on women entirely. In his head, he imagined the amazing sex Jamie and Damon were probably having, the same way he’d already imagined the amazing sex Jamie and Jane had probably had. He thought about the way Damon would sink to his knees and

submit to Jamie the same way he submitted to Alex. Graham squeezed his eyes shut, trying to burn the thought out of his mind.

It was going to be a very long walk home.

**

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

> Thanks for following along guys. <3 I've been crazy super appreciative of all the comments/love. I'm hoping to get the last chunk of this written during the downtime of the holidays. We're so close! In the meantime, I made some arts fueled by insomnia. :| :)
>
> Please note I took some liberties with song lyrics based on some fan interpretations of lyrics that this blog post wrote about, so GT (stands for gin and tonic), it's not a mistype.

"Shit! "

Graham yelled out as he stubbed his toe on the studio door. He held his right foot tenderly with one hand, pushing the door open with his free hand. His hands fumbled with the light switch and one by one the fluorescent lights flickered on above him, burning white lines into his retinas.

He jumped as a voice called out from him from the far end of the studio.

"Who's there?"

Graham looked up to see two black silhouettes staring back at him from the recording booth.

He held his hands over his eyes, squinting. "Damon?"

One of the silhouettes moved toward him, opening the door to the recording booth.

"Graham?" Damon looked at him as though he were paranoid. "What are you doing here so late?"

Graham held a hand to his head, stepping backward. He felt dizzy. "I...forgot my guitar. I needed it so I came back."

Damon looked at him incredulously, and then glanced down at his wristwatch. "Graham, it's 10:30 at night. You really couldn't wait until practice tomorrow morning?"

“No.” Graham screwed up his face. He staggered unsteadily on his feet, pointing at Jamie. “What is *he* doing here?”

“Nothing. We were just going over some project notes—” Damon stopped, giving Graham a sideways look. “Wait, are you drunk?”

Graham hiccuped, smiling back at Damon from ear to ear. He shook his head. “No.”

Damon walked toward him and leaned in. “God, yes you are. You reek.”

“I’m fine.” Graham announced loud enough to cause Jamie to flinch in the adjacent room.

“You’re taking notes, eh?”

Damon looked back desperately at Jamie, who gave him a shrugging look.

“Graham.”

“Does taking notes require instrumentation?” Graham laughed, raising his voice and enunciating the last few syllables like he thought it was funny.

“Graham.”

Graham hiccuped again, leaning against the wall for support. “Seems a bit silly to me.”

“GRAHAM.”

“What?”

“Listen. Please. I’m calling you a cab.”

“NO.” Graham retorted loudly, causing Damon’s eyes to widen. He pushed himself off the wall he was leaning on. “I’m fine. I just had one little drink earlier, that’s all.”

“Graham, you had more than one drink. I’m not going to argue with you.” Damon reached his hand out between them. He shook his head. “I’m going to call you a cab so you don’t get arrested or something worse.”

Damon raised his eyebrows, looking back at Jamie. “The phone’s

downstairs." He glanced apprehensively at Graham who was beginning to circle around the recording studio. "Make sure he doesn't leave while I'm gone?"

Jamie looked back at Damon as if he were asking him to babysit the world's largest kindergartner. Out of the corner of his eye, he could sense Graham's eyes burning holes into his head like he was the world's next Hitler.

Jamie nodded hesitantly. "Yeah, sure thing."

"Okay, I'll be back in a minute."

No sooner than Damon was out of earshot, Graham stopped pacing and stood directly in front of Jamie, flashing him a tight-lipped smile.

"Oh, Jamie. How's Jamie these days?" Graham looked down at the mess of notes on the table, his voice slurring slightly as he spoke. "Is this your secret project that you're working on again? What is it...Go-ril-laz?" Graham dragged out the last syllable, and Jamie forced an awkward smile.

"Is that really what you're calling it? That sounds rather stupid, doesn't it?"

Jamie briefly touched his nose and looked away. "Graham, I think you should—"

"Oh, Damon. He's so mysterious, isn't he?" Graham interrupted him, narrowing his eyes. He leafed through the mess of papers and sketches. "He thinks he's soooo fucking clever."

Still looking down at the table, Graham lifted his hands, gesturing air quotes. "Damon, the artist. Damon, the actor. Damon, the boy with eternal youth." Graham spit sarcastically.

Graham turned away, kicking at one of the amps on the floor. "Yeah, right. What a fucking cunt."

"Graham, don't…" Jamie tried to dissuade him, signaling for him to sit down.

"Don't what? Tell you the truth?" Graham's eyes lit up.

"Graham, why don't you sit down..."

"I mean, Heaven forbid you ever find out what he's *really* like."

Graham ran his finger languidly across the table, looking up at Jamie through his lashes.

Jamie laughed nervously, giving Graham an incredulous look. “Look, mate, I really don’t want to talk to you like this, yeah? I think you’ve had a lot to drink.”

“I’m fine.” Standing uncomfortably close, Graham began to play with the buttons on Jamie’s jacket. “I’ve only had one drink. I told you that. Is this vintage?”

“Yeah, I know you did, mate.” Jamie pushed Graham back gingerly by the shoulders, directing him toward one of the chairs. “Just…sit down, yeah?”

Graham collapsed backwards into the chair, finally, and Jamie let out a sigh of relief. Graham lifted his chin, looking down the bridge of his nose at Jamie.

“So, has Damon told you his big secret yet?”

“Oh, hell.” Jamie crossed his arms, sighing loudly. “Is this how it’s going to be all night with you then?”

“Come here.”

“What?” Jamie shot back, clearly annoyed.

“Come closer.”

Jamie rolled his eyes.

“What is it?”

“Damon’s little secret…” Graham said quietly, almost laughing, his hand brushing Jamie’s arm as he leaned in next to his ear. Jamie couldn’t help but feel nauseous from the smell of gin on Graham’s breath.

Graham propped his head up on his arm, looking up through his eyelashes. “Remember that night he came home late? That’s because he was fucking me.” He nodded slowly, a sly smile creeping up on his face. He pointed toward the recording monitor. “Right. There.”

Jamie stared back at him, his expression illegible. For a brief, fleeting moment, it looked as though all the color had been drained from his face.

“Annnnnd,” Graham added, stepping back. He mock-imitated shooting a needle into his vein and starting laughing. “He was high as a fucking kite.”

Graham’s face suddenly became very serious. He flashed his eyes at Jamie. “But he didn’t want you to find that out, oh no. Because Damon doesn’t have problems. He’s invincible, you know.”

Jamie swallowed slowly, his face sheet white. All the brightness seemed to be lost from his eyes. Blinking a few times, he repeated himself quietly. “You need to sit down. Now.”

Graham looked up to see Damon standing in the doorway, arms crossed and every vein in his neck looking as though it were about ready to burst.

“Get out.” Damon seethed through clenched teeth.

Graham looked at Damon, then to Jamie, then back at Damon again.

“Get the fuck out.” Damon pointed toward the door. “ *Now* . Or I’m dragging you out.”

“What?” Graham shifted his weight from one foot to another, looking Jamie straight in the eye. Jamie rubbed his chin, shooting Damon a look that suggested something between contempt and annoyance, before turning his back toward the both of them.

“Oh no.” Graham covered his mouth with his hands and laughed. “Does this mean I’ve broken up the Glimmer Twins?”

Without a word, Damon grabbed Graham roughly by the collar and began to drag him out of the studio, Graham kicking and screaming at Damon’s legs along the entire way.

Graham yelled out as Damon threw him out onto the street, his arm scraping across the hard concrete.

Damon threw a wad of bills and coins at him, which scattered across the pavement with a jarring dissonance.

“Here’s your fucking cab money.” Damon shook his head, slamming the studio door behind him.

Graham heaved as he picked himself up slowly from the sidewalk, struggling to get upright. Standing, he stumbled a few steps backwards

and reached out for the wall to steady himself.

“Fucking prick. I’ll walk.” He muttered underneath his breath, jamming his hands into his jacket pockets to find a cigarette. Tottering forward a few steps, he cupped his hand over his face, and flicked his lighter once, twice, three times.

Without warning, he heard the sound of screeching brakes fill his ears and bright sharp headlights blinded him. Thereafter followed a quick sharp pain, and the world went black.

**

“Hey sonny, wake up.”

Graham heard the sound of snapping fingers above him. He opened his eyes slowly, blinking several times. Above him, what appeared to be an officer in uniform came slowly into focus. He felt his fag slip from his lips onto the ground. His head really did feel like a train had hit it this time.

“Am I dead?” Graham asked plainly.

“No, but you've had a nasty knock, son. We're taking you to hospital."

“Shit.” Graham groaned and covered his eyes.

**

Damon could tell Alex was much more tired than usual when he stepped into the studio that morning. His hair seemed to be everywhere, fag hanging loosely from his lips as he unpacked his bass and began to plug in.

He glanced up as Damon passed, giving him a double take before looking back down at his shoes.

“How is he?” Damon asked, sounding like he half-regretted it.

Alex stood up, pinching his cigarette with two fingers and inhaling slowly. “Fine. Today, anyway.”

Damon nodded, his arms crossed. He looked away. “Good.”

Alex sighed. “They want to keep him a few days longer. They’re concerned that his concussion might cause a massive depression.”

Damon's eyes widened slightly.

"Right?" Alex smiled, slapping a very stiff Damon on the shoulder. "That's exactly what I thought. Nothing to worry about."

Alex took another drag, before letting his arm hang loosely by his side. He looked up at Damon pensively.

"So you're still not going to visit him, then?"

Glancing at him sideways, Damon cleared his throat and began to turn away.

"Thanks for the update, Alex."

"Wait." Alex stopped him. He reached into back pocket, pulling out a small rectangular package.

"Graham asked me to give this to you."

Damon stared down at the yellow package.

"Thanks." Damon said quietly, taking the package and immediately setting it down on the table. Turning on his heel, he walked away.

Damon's back turned, Alex rolled his eyes. He looked down at the lone package on the table, muttering underneath his breath. "Tosser."

**

Damon jingled his keys as he did his last walk-through of the studio, flicking all the light switches off as he went. Practice that week had been mediocre, at best. Sans their guitar player, most of it has been Alex and Dave working on rhythm sections while Damon paced around the studio barking at the producer like it was his problem that the songs weren't coming along. The dissonance in the band, particularly between Graham and Damon, had lately become so palpable that even Stephen Street was throwing his hands up at the end of the day and announcing that even he wasn't sure there would be another Blur record.

Moving to turn off the last light, Damon paused, the yellow package Alex had given him earlier catching his attention. He hesitated, then shook his head, turning off the light and closing the door behind him. He pulled his keys out of his jacket pocket, fumbling with the lock. Turning, he walked five steps and stopped. His jacket pocket vibrated.

He pulled out his phone, staring down at the number which read: Jamie.

“Hello?”

“Hey. Are you coming to the pub tonight?”

Damon rubbed at his eyes. “Yeah. No. Maybe.” He shook his head. “It’s been a long week.”

There was brief silence on the other end, and then the sound of Jamie laughing underneath his breath. “Alright. *Maybe* I’ll see you then.”

The phone went dead, and Damon leaned back, looking up at the ceiling. “Fucking hell.” He turned around, unlocking the door to the studio and snatching the package off the table.

Sighing, he collapsed into one of the studio chairs. He placed the package on the soundboard in front of him, chewing on his bottom lip. His hands reached out, absentmindedly playing with the buttons on the monitor and in his mind’s eye he could see Graham looking back at him, bent over and cloaked in darkness, peering up at him with wide, frightened eyes.

After a few ruminative moments, he snatched the package off the soundboard and began to open it, unceremoniously ripping the back of the package open. A cassette tape and an envelope dropped out onto his lap. Written in squiggly black marker handwriting he immediately recognized as Graham’s, the front of the envelope gave clear instructions. “1) read me.” The cassette tape read: “2) listen to me.”

Biting his lip, Damon tapped the unopened envelope against his knee. Whether or not he was contemplating opening it or just stalling, he couldn’t decide.

Sticking his thumb underneath the adhesive, Damon ripped open the envelope and pulled out a small, folded note out.

D,

I don’t even know if you’re going to read this, but I had to try. I’m sorry. I’m really sorry. I messed up everything again, as usual. You know me.

I know you’re really angry with me, and you have every right.

I'm sorry I lied. I did get the letter you sent me last year, the one about us going away for a while, having a rest, and starting over. I was too scared to reply. I was sick, both of us are kind of sick, you know. I didn't want to take things up into my own hands. I was scared of everything. I didn't want to get better then…

I want to get better now.

-G

Damon quietly folded the letter, placing it back in the package. He picked up the cassette tape and slowly turned it over in his hands. His thumb brushed against a sticky post it note on the back that read: "the lyrics you asked for."

Walking across the room, he placed the cassette tape into one of the players, and pressed his finger down on the play button with a loud click.

What sounded like the staticky shuffling of a mic being dragged against the floor poured out of the studio speakers, and Damon could hear Graham clearing his throat. Strumming guitar chords filled the entirety of the studio, and Damon recognized it as the same song Graham had played a few months ago on their first day back in the studio. Graham's singing voice strained through the noise.

Sad, drunk, and poorly
Sleeping really late
Sad, drunk, and poorly
Not feeling so great
Wandering lost in a town full of frowns

GT and coffee
Helps to start the day
Tea Tea and coffee

Shaking all the way
City's alive and, surprise, so am I
Tea, tea and coffee
Get no sleep today

And I feel the light
When the sky's just mud and grey
And I feel the light
When you tell me it's OK
Cos you're so great, and I love you

Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

> I apologize, I've had some serious writer's block along with the holidays happening last week which is why this chapter is a bit late. Some fun notes for reading now or maybe after (spoilers?): Damon has mentioned this dream many times, initially back in the late 90's when the band visited Iceland and he also referenced the same dream in his song Photographs a few years ago. Also here's some fan art again, because. And now that I've click-baited the hell out of you, thank you for reading. I hope you enjoy. xx

Damon stepped out of his hotel room wearing a beanie with the word Chelsea written on the front and the ugliest blue jumper Graham had ever seen in his life. So ugly in fact, that for a moment, he genuinely wondered what terrible thing he'd done to Damon to warrant such an assault on his senses.

"Is that what you're really wearing? It looks like you picked it up from a charity shop."

"Oh, this?" Damon looked down at the sweater. "It was a Christmas present from my mum."

Graham scrunched up his nose.

Damon arched his cat-limbs, reached into his front pocket to extract a cigarette, and tossed it at his lips. It fell to the floor immediately, as always, and Damon cursed beneath his breath.

"One day I'm gonna get it."

"Just a regular casanova, you are." Graham said briefly, and Damon looked back at him nonplussed.

"What?"

"You okay? You look a bit...fuzzy."

"Yeah." Damon smiled, grabbing Graham by the shoulders and pulling him into his arms. "Just figured...one last hurrah, you know."

"Right." Graham looked down at his feet, and kicked at the floor. He smiled slightly. "One more bit of fun, then it's..."

"...over."

"Yeah."

Damon kissed him on the cheek, scruff rubbing against Graham's face as he did so, and Graham blushed, wiggling his way out of his arms. "Dames—not in public. Really."

Damon pulled back, brushing a hair behind Graham's ear. "Alright. Where to next?"

"I dunno."

"I have an idea." Damon's hand round Graham's arm tightened. "Come on."

**

Graham felt his bones shake as they stepped out onto the snowy curb, the cold hitting him like a slap in the face. Reykjavik had to have been the coldest place he had ever been, but he had to admit, there was something a bit magical about it. For the past few weeks, Damon had been talking to him nonstop about Iceland; he had made it sound like it was the best place in the entire world. Graham was dubious, of course. For someone who followed lunar cycles in his youth, he couldn't help but be a little skeptic of Damon's enthusiasm sometimes.

Cold weather was bad enough, but—a promise was a promise—and Damon had said that it would be easy for them to get clean here. And for once, maybe because of some crazy wild hope Damon had managed to thread into him, he almost believed it would be possible.

Graham's secret hope of spending most of his afternoon alone with Damon had died when Alex decided that they all needed to go see the whales, because it was terrible, he said, what they did to the whales. So now, with just a few short hours of light left, he and Damon were finally escaping to be alone, unbeknownst to the rest of the band. They found themselves spewed out through the snowstorm and into the dim, throbbing cave of a cab, Damon's hand on his knee the whole time, and Graham couldn't help but smile.

Damon stuffed an indeterminate wad of krónas into the cabbie's hand, and asked for him to take them to Kaffibarinn, a bar Damon had told

Graham was his favorite. Reeling onto the snowy roads, the cab driver took the corners with such momentum that they were thrown together on one side of the backseat, Graham's head on top of Damon's chest, and when Graham tried to correct himself Damon insisted on keeping him there.

Graham's cheeks flushed as he protested weakly. "Hey."

"Well, you looked cold." Damon said finally, and Graham lifted his eyes as Damon looked away, admiring his friend's face silhouetted against the paling window.

By the time they'd stepped out of the cab, hurried across the walkway and swung open the door to dark interior of Kaffibarinn, Graham's glasses had fogged up so badly that Damon burst out laughing.

Squinting, Graham removed his glasses and cleaned them, elbowing Damon in the side. He smiled. "Stop."

Graham looked up to see the bartender looking curiously at the both of them. He immediately wiped the smile off his face.

He acknowledged Damon first. "What can I get you two?"

Shaking his coat off, Damon tromped up to the counter, snowflakes still caught in his hair and a wide, stupid grin on his face. It made Graham smile, involuntarily, because strangely he couldn't help but think how he looked just like old Damon right then.

"Yes. We'll have some..." Damon paused, peering over his shoulder at Graham for an answer.

"Glenlivet. 12 Year." Graham replied, not missing a beat.

Graham quickly slipped into his seat at the bar, and Damon's eyes briefly flicked up to acknowledge him, gaze glowing. His cheeks were still bright red from the cold and Graham had to break his gaze out of self-consciousness. Even after all these years, he felt painfully self aware in front of Damon, like a skinny kid in a locker room all over again. And especially when he looked at him like that—like how he used to.

And now, sitting here, every time he tried to concentrate his mind glided off like a skater, thinking about an hour ago in their hotel room, an hour ago in the shower, an hour ago on the very lovely and rustic Icelandic rug they'd likely ruined, Damon's prying fingers

touching all sorts of unnatural places, and then that stupid, bloody jumper. God.

Graham smiled and smiled.

The bartender placed two glasses of scotch on the bar in front of them. "Anything else I can get you, sir?" He looked at both of them.

Damon waved his hand at the bartender. "Just the whole bottle." He paused, looking toward Graham. "It's a...special occasion."

The bartender set down the bottle of opened 12 year between them and smiled. "Certainly."

Graham raised an eyebrow. "What was that all about? You're acting like you own the place or something."

"Well, that's because I do." Damon responded, laughing. "I bought this place a year ago."

"Wow, you *are* head over heels in love with this place, aren't you?"

"Irreparably, I suppose. Like other things." Damon smiled, raising his glass to Graham's. "Cheers."

Hours later, they stumbled out of Kaffibarinn, Damon holding him tightly to his chest and making laughing bellows so loud that Graham thought the whole city must have heard them. Their heads were both fuzzy, fuzzier than normal, but it was a good feeling. At least Graham thought so.

Damon staggered a bit as he bent over, picking up a ball of snow with his hands.

Graham's eyes widened. "What do you think you're doing?"

Damon shoved the handful of snow down the back of Graham's neck, and Graham yelled out.

"Argh, you bastard!" He picked up his own bit of snow, packing it deeply into his hand and going to throw it at Damon.

"No!" Damon started laughing as he ran down the alleyway away from him. Graham quickly followed, crossing the road so quickly that he almost slipped on a patch of black ice and fell headfirst into Damon.

“Whoa, whoa. Slow down there.” Damon grabbed his shoulders, kissing him right on the mouth. Graham immediately blushed. “How drunk are you?”

“Pretty drunk.”

“Good. Me too.” Damon’s hand messed with Graham’s fringe in a futile attempt to get the snowflakes out of his hair, and Graham scrunched up his nose.

“You’re always mothering me.”

“That’s because you always need to be mothered, Graham.”

Graham shivered again, watching his breath turn white in the icy air.

“Where should we go?”

“I dunno. I’m cold.”

“Back to the hotel?”

Damon looked down at him quietly, saying nothing. Bending down he kissed Graham again, lingering longer than usual, and Graham felt his face immediately get hot.

“Dames…stop…really. Someone is going to see us.” Graham whispered with bated breath, eyes wide as he looked around in all directions. He squirmed underneath Damon as he noticed two young women in black trench coats wandering down the alleyway.

“Dames.” Graham said again, tugging on Damon’s shoulder. “There’s people coming.”

“I don’t care. Let them look.” Damon sighed between breaths, kissing him deeply again. Graham felt like his face was at least a thousand degrees.

The color completely drained from his face as he peered over Damon’s shoulder at the two women who’d approached them. They had stopped just a few feet away from them, turning toward one another and giggling in Icelandic.

Damon, who up until that point had been oblivious, finally pulled back from kissing Graham and spun around.

He smiled, his cheeks flushing bright red at the sight of the two girls.

“Oh, hello.”

“Hello.” One of the girls said with a thick Icelandic accent. She blushed, and her friend giggled.

“Sorry…” She said quietly. “We just wanted to say hello because—” Her friend elbowed her in the side, and they both giggled. “My friend just thought you were a very cute couple.”

“Oh.” Damon’s facial muscles relaxed, relief washing over his face. Graham laughed nervously behind him, nearly squeaking.

“What are your names?” The shyer girl on the right asked while covering her face.

Damon looked back at Graham, his mouth hanging open. “Um…”

“Alex.” Graham said quickly, before Damon could respond. “He’s Alex. And I’m...Dave.”

Graham reached his hands out to awkwardly shake both girls’ hands and they both started giggling uncontrollably again.

“It’s very nice to meet you, Alex and Dave...” The girl on the left said, looking at the both of them. “I am Sevia and this is Ada. How long have you two been together?” Sevia looked toward Graham and Graham looked down at his feet.

Damon turned to him. “That’s a very good question, isn’t it *Dave?”* He smirked, wrapping his arm around Graham’s waist. He then looked up at the sky, as though contemplating.

“I don't know, what would you say Dave? How long have we been together? 17, 18 years?”

Graham bit his upper lip, covering his face with his hands.

“17 years! *Wow.* You both look so happy. Very in love. Congratulations.” Ada said, still shy, and motioned toward the both of them. Her face was now as bright red as Graham's. “Well...on with the butter!” Both girls waved at them and started to run down the alleyway, giggling.

Damon looked at Graham strangely. “On with the what?”

“On with the butter. It means, ‘carry on.’” Graham said quietly.

“How the hell do you know—”

“It was in my travel book.”

Rolling his eyes, Damon pulled Graham back into his arms and whispered in his ear through closed teeth. “Alex, *really*.”

“I hope you know you’ll have to call me Dave from now on.”

“I’m sure Alex and Dave will really appreciate that, Gra.” Damon fussed with Graham’s hair again and Graham scrunched up his face. Damon pulled at his arm.

“Come on. I have a place I want to show you. Follow me.”

**

In a brief moment of lunacy, Graham actually almost believed that he was dreaming when they reached the crest of the the hill and arrived on the beach with black sands like Damon had told him about. Which is why he almost laughed when Damon mentioned offhandedly, “I used to dream about this place.”

“What do you mean?”

“I used to have a recurring dream, as a child, of a black sand beach.” Damon looked down at his feet, kicking at the ground. “I was watching TV and I saw a programme about Iceland, and they had black beaches. So I got on a plane, and booked a hotel, and now I’m here.”

Graham laughed underneath his breath. “Sounds very romantic.”

“It was.” Damon smiled, his eyes fixated on Graham. “It is.”

Graham broke eye contact, shrugging his shoulders.

“So was this one like your other recurring dreams?”

“What other recurring dreams?”

Graham looked at him as though he were about to laugh, and a slow look of realization crept over Damon’s face. He chuckled. “Oh, those dreams. Right.”

Both of them stepped delicately over the volcanic stones leading up to the beach, freezing cold wind whipping their hair into their faces.

Damon pointed to a large, black monolithic stone in the distance. “There,” he said loudly over the sound of the waves, and Graham, still feeling a bit miserable from the cold, nodded.

“Day, I don’t know how much longer I can—”

“We’re almost there, I promise.” Damon grabbed him by the hand. “Come on.”

As they approached the monolithic stone Graham noticed a bizarre, recessed hollow carved into the rock wall adjacent to the beach. Squeezing his hand, Damon quickly pulled them into what Graham might have considered a cave by stretched standards of imagination. It was tall enough to stand in, but not much more.

“Ah, fuck.” Graham’s teeth chattered. “It’s so bloody cold.” He peered into the darkness. “How far back does this thing go?”

“Just a couple more feet, that’s all.”

Still shivering, Graham wrapped his arms around himself. “I take it you come here a lot.”

“Just a couple of times.”

Damon rubbed his hands up and down Graham’s shoulders. He slipped his hands into his pocket and produced two cigarettes. “Here.” He lit both stems and stepped back, lazily leaning back against the rock wall. Gazing toward the beach, he exhaled slowly, letting the smoke flair slowly from his nostrils so his eyes were veiled.

Graham couldn’t help but stare at Damon, then. He looked terrific. He hadn’t gotten used to the way Damon had grown out his hair yet, or the way his skin had begun to bronze under too many hours of being in the Icelandic sun. In fact, the only familiar part of Damon these days, he thought, was the bead necklace from his mother Hazel, which hung around his neck like a lost vestigial of both of their childhoods. He remembered how Damon’s eyes lit up when they were both children, mentioning how his mother did magic and pulling at his beads as though to convince Graham of it.

Thinking of this, Graham laughed softly and Damon turned back to look at him.

“What?”

“Nothing.”

Damon quietly smiled back at him, his index and middle finger gracefully placing his cigarette between his lips.

“It’s beautiful, isn’t it?” He nodded toward the ocean. Graham glanced up at the infinitesimal glow of the stars.

“It’s a bit...scary I guess. Makes me feel small.” Graham said quietly. He could feel his buzz beginning to wear off, and the familiar knee-jerk panic of not being able to have another drink was finally starting to set in.

He paused, feeling a draft of cold air wash over both of them. “What was your dream? About here, I mean.”

Damon smiled again, taking another drag. “Are you sure you want to hear it?”

“Of course.”

Damon inhaled and exhaled slowly, peering out toward the beach again. The monolithic stone stood far off in the distance, large, violent waves crashing against the rock.

“I dreamt that we were flying in this…” Damon reached his hand out, motioning abstractly to the sky. “Slowly crashing aeroplane, made out of glass. It would always fly over black sand beaches.”

“We?” Graham laughed quietly, studying Damon’s face. “You mean, you and I?”

Damon nodded, a slight smile creeping up on his face. “I know, it sounds silly to you.” He said softly, his smile disappearing into a straight line. His deep voice vibrated against the walls of the cave. “But I always found it quite beautiful. Like perhaps if you stayed long enough, you could pass into another world.”

“You mean, if you survived long enough.”

Damon turned toward him. “Yeah, I guess so.” He smiled.

Graham looked down at his hands. They had begun to shake ever so slightly. He scanned his brain, trying to remember if he’d packed any mini bottles in his travel bag, and if maybe, just maybe when Damon wasn’t looking he could sneak some, just so he could string this lovely

little feeling out a bit longer.

“Did we ever survive?" Graham asked softly. “In your dream, I mean.”

Damon shook his head slowly, the corners of his lips upturning slightly. Pressing his cigarette into the ground, Damon shifted to sit next to him. Graham tucked his head into Damon's shoulder.
He faintly smelled like something familiar, Graham thought, like that strange spicy smell his mother Hazel used to burn in her studio when they were children.

“So, what do we do now?”

Damon looked down at him, dark blue eyes flickering in the moonlight. Graham could still hear the sound of waves crashing against the rock in the distance.

“What do you mean?”

Damon placed a sweaty hand over Graham's shaking one, and he could feel Damon’s pulse pounding against his wrist. To see Damon sweating in the midst of so much cold made his heart tear, but for selfish reasons, it comforted Graham to realize they were both sharing the same comedown.

“I mean, what do we do when the plane crashes?”

Damon bowed his chin, looking up at Graham pensively. He smiled. “I guess we enjoy it.”

Graham blinked his eyes slowly, feeling a wave of tiredness come over him. He sighed, burying his head in Damon’s shoulder again, Damon's arm ringed around his waist, and fell asleep listening to the sound of the waves against the rocks.

Graham awoke to Damon kissing him from above, his lips ice cold, and his eyes full of a certain desperation Graham couldn’t quite place.

He moved to kiss him again, and Graham stood still, intoxicated by the smell of sandalwood and the promise of warmth.

Damon’s tongue quickly slipped between his lips, teeth gently squeezing down. Warm fingers threaded themselves into his hair, and instinctively Graham arched his neck forward, allowing Damon to make small kisses up and down the length of his collarbone. In a few beats, Damon’s fingers plied with the zipper on his coat and Graham

grabbed his hand to stop him.

“Dames—I’m going to freeze to death.” Graham stared at him strangely. “What’s gotten in you?”

All the color was gone from Damon’s face, he looked like a ghost. Graham noticed his whole body was now shaking with sweat. “Damon?”

“I won’t let you freeze.” Damon looked back him breathlessly. “I just need you right now. To get me through this. Please.”

Graham looked at him. Slowly, he removed his hand, allowing Damon to unzip his coat.

“Believe me, the last thing I will let you feel is cold.”

Graham closed his eyes, allowing Damon to push him backward onto the ground. Damon gently lifted Graham’s head up, placing his coat underneath his head. He moved to remove Graham’s shirt and Graham winced, painfully conscious of the cold air on his body. The blood underneath his skin began to rise up in goosebumps, and Damon quickly bent down, attending with his tongue and teeth to every part of Graham’s body that stung red. Reaching downward, his hands quickly unbuttoned Graham’s jeans, pulling them down in one go and exposing him completely to the cold.

“Oh, fuck.” Graham squeezed his eyes shut, clearly in discomfort. Thankfully, within seconds he felt Damon’s warm tongue on his cock and his back arched up against the hard ground.

Moving slowly, Damon’s tongue languidly circled the head of his cock and Graham mewled underneath him. He looked down at Damon nervously. “Don’t…judge…it’s cold.”

Damon chuckled, moving up to kiss him. “I would never judge you.”

At this point, Graham’s entire body was tremoring, whether from the cold or from withdrawal or maybe both, it didn’t seem to matter. It all felt awful. They both must have hit their withdrawal at the same time. Above him, Graham could feel Damon’s erection pressing against his stomach and he closed his eyes again. Slowly, Damon ran his fingers down the length of his cock and suddenly Graham’s head was swirling.

“Turn over, love.”

Snapping his eyes open, Graham obliged him, turning over and propping himself up on his elbows. From somewhere behind him he could hear the sound of Damon unzipping his jeans and then suddenly, there were the tremors again, huge goosebumps rising up on his skin. Within seconds he felt Damon's hands running warm trails up and down the length of his back, soothing him. Strangely, the contrasted sensation of extremes—hot and cold—on all the sensitive parts of his body was causing him to contract and bend and arch in all the places Damon wanted him to.

Graham elicited a small moan as Damon drove into him, quickly and without warning. His voice echoed off the walls of rock. Damon's cock felt like a warm blanket on a bed of ice and Graham immediately arched his back up to meet him, hips pressing backward so that the length of Damon's cock filled him entirely. Shivering, he felt his muscles tighten involuntarily and Damon moaned loudly in response, pulling back and pushing deeper into him until they were so tight against one another that he couldn't feel the cold anymore.

"Fuck."

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing. It's just...you're cold, so you're so fucking tight."

Graham lowered his head down, watching as his breath turned into white mist between his legs.

He whimpered, protesting as Damon pulled out, but then was greeted the by warm, wet sensation of Damon tonguing him. Graham moaned involuntarily as Damon's tongue slipped inside him, his cock hanging hard and painful and untouched just a few centimeters away. He moved to touch himself but Damon stopped him, replacing Graham's hand with his mouth while the free fingers of his other hand replaced where his tongue had been, slowly sliding in and out of him.

Graham looked down, watching as Damon's head bobbed up and down between his legs, Graham's cock buried deep in his throat, and he squeezed his eyes shut. The visual alone was too much for him to handle.

"Dames, careful I'm going to—"

To Graham's conflicted relief, he pulled back. Readjusting, Damon shifted both of their bodies so that they were laying on their sides, covered only by Damon's coat. Positioning himself again, Damon

immediately slid, warm and wet into him again, this time biting down hard on Graham's exposed shoulder with his teeth.

Graham mewled softly and Damon whispered in his ear, "You like that, don't you?"

Graham nodded quietly, feeling more breathless than normal. He felt Damon's fingers intertwine with his own, pressing his arms down against the floor and roughly pushing in and out of him.

"You love having my cock in your arse, don't you?"

Graham nodded, his eyes half-glazed.

"Tell me how much you like it."

Graham felt the head of his cock twitch and moved to touch himself but Damon stopped him again, replacing Graham's hand instead with his own, very firm grip. He began to stroke Graham in unison with his rhythm and Graham's head became swimmy and drunk again.

"Tell me."

"I love it. I love when you fuck me." Graham breathed heavily into Damon's ear and Damon responded by inserting his index finger into Graham's mouth. Graham was happy to play along with this game. Moving his tongue in a circular motion, Graham sucked on Damon's finger, using all the willpower he had left to distract himself from the feeling of Damon's controlling hand on his cock.

"Look at you, you're such a whore. You've done this so many times, haven't you?" Graham winced as Damon's stroking hand tightened its grip. "I bet that's all you think about when you touch yourself, isn't it?"

Graham pressed his hips back into Damon's.

"Do you suck Alex's cock like this too?"

Graham nodded his head, suddenly feeling even more turned on by Damon's impromptu dirty talk. Eyes closed, he pulled Damon's middle finger into his mouth and Damon began to slide both fingers in and out his mouth slowly.

"Look at me. Do you love it when Alex fucks you too?"

"Yes."

“Does he fuck you as good as this?”

“No.”

“Does he make you come like this?”

“No, Day—”

“What if I stopped fucking you right now?”

“No, please.”

“What if I left you here right now? With your cock hanging out and everything? In the cold, all alone.”

“Please, no.”

Graham’s voice cracked in a way he’d never heard before, and Damon shoved his fingers down his throat even further.

“You’d never see me again.”

Graham winced. Damon’s fingernails had dug so hard into his side that he was almost positive it had drawn blood.

“Day, please.”

Damon thrust into him, hard and violent and unloving and Graham felt his entire body shake underneath his grip.

“ *Fuck* —”

Graham leaned his head back, exposing his neck, and Damon moved his fingers from Graham’s mouth to his throat. Eyes snapping open, Graham gasped as Damon’s hand squeezed down on his throat so tightly he could hardly breathe. Damon began to push deeper, faster, rougher into him and Graham’s heart began to race.

“Damon—”

Damon wasn't listening to him anymore.

“Damon, stop, I can’t breathe—” Graham choked again between breaths and finally Damon released his grip, thrusting forward one last time and coming hard and deep inside of him. Graham came soon after, his warm seed spilling onto Damon’s hand, and they both collapsed into each other’s arms, heaving. Without saying a word,

Damon immediately pulled Graham closer, holding him much more tightly than Graham was used to.

Graham stared up at the rock ceiling above their heads, his heart pounding against the arms Damon was gripping him with. He couldn't move, even if he'd wanted to.

Damon brushed a hair behind his ear. "I love you," he said quietly.

Graham swallowed slowly, still staring upward. He listened to the distant sound of waves crashing against the rock.

Damon repeated himself. "I love you."

Graham swallowed, still feeling the imprint of where Damon's hand had been on his neck. He prayed to whatever God still existed that it wouldn't be purple there tomorrow, for his sanity's sake, so that he wouldn't have to explain it to anyone.

"I love you too."

"Promise me you won't leave this time."

Graham blinked slowly, feeling his heart thump against his chest. "I won't leave you."

"Say it again."

"I won't leave you."

"Promise me."

"I promise."

**

Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

> Thank you for your patience on this one, I'm sorry for being late again. This was one of the hardest chapters for me to write. This chapter may seem a little PwP (porn without plot) at times, but trust me, there is a legitimate plot to this.

It had been 12 hours since he'd taken his last hit. He had a post-it note above his bed. Each hour he checked off with a little tally. That didn't mean anything. It may have been a year in the space of time inside his head.

Awoken from uneasy dreams, he paced the length of the green fluorescent hallway, pausing at the yellow light underneath Graham's door. His head buzzed and whirred like the static on a tv screen. He felt underslept and dull and disappointed, the way he always did after 12 hours. In 24 hours it would be worse.

He flicked his lighter and inhaled. He coughed into his arm, trying to muffle the sound. The pot Alex had given him earlier was terrible, godawful in fact, but it was the only high he could get right now. He would take it.

When he stepped into Graham's room he didn't expect to see Alex there. He stood, poised in the shadow of the doorway, observing Alex sitting on the bed looking down at Graham with worried eyes. Breathing in, he felt the cannabis slowly starting to kick in. His head floated somewhere toward the ceiling and stayed there, bouncing in and out.

He quietly watched as Alex's fingers brushed through Graham's hair, his own head in a nice little fuzzy space now. He tilted his head, observing Alex bend down and kiss him, and he watched as Graham let him do so without hesitation.

The thought that Alex might actually love him had not occurred to Damon.

In his head, he'd imagined it differently. He'd imagined that Graham and Alex were really just a string of one-off fucks collected on hazy nights when Graham was too drunk to know better. It wasn't anything real. Graham was no different to Alex than cocaine or groupies or a

nice laugh over a bottle of wine. An addict's indulgence at the best of times. A friend, a mother. Another Ivor award for Alex to put on his shelf—as if Graham's admiration were some little checkbox on a running tally of things Alex needed to pencil in to get underneath Damon's skin. At least, that's what he had always thought.

"What happened?" Alex asked him, and Graham rolled over onto his stomach.

"Nothing."

"This isn't nothing, Gra." Alex said in a concerned voice, his fingertips brushing the faint purple and blue bruise marks on Graham's neck.

"I don't want to talk about it."

"Graham. Come on, we discussed this. You promised you'd be honest with me if Damon was…" Alex drifted off. "This isn't healthy. This isn't normal, you know."

Alex eyed the bruises on Graham's neck again, before running his fingers through his scalp.

"I don't feel well." Graham mumbled, muffled by the pillow. "I'm going to throw up." He lifted his head, looking up at Alex.

"Turn over."

Graham rolled onto his back. He looked desperate. "I just need a drink. Just one drink, Alex. Please."

Alex shook his head. "No."

Graham tossed his shoulders back. "That's not fair, Alex. What are you on? You must be on something. Look at you, you're all fuzzy and I'm just...fucked."

"I'm not letting you drink tonight, Gra. So stop asking."

Graham stared down at his hands and began nervously picking at his fingernails.

Alex grabbed his hands. "Stop."

The muscles in Graham's face tightened.

Alex rested his cheek on his palm and looked up at Graham through

his fringe.

Graham glanced up from his hands. “Don’t.” He said, smiling for a millisecond before his mouth returned to a straight line.

Pursing his lips, Alex expertly flicked his hair out of his face.

“Stop. Really, stop.” Graham smiled again, looking away. He scratched at his face. “You know that kills me.”

“I know.” Alex said quietly. “That’s exactly why I do it.”

“Do you still have that fucking wig?”

“Oh, you mean Cindy?” Alex smirked. “Yes.”

Graham looked up with a devious look on his face. “You’ll never let me forget Cindy, will you?”

“I still have that skirt too.”

“I still can’t believe Damon didn’t catch us that day. We were practically fucking right next to him.”

Alex sat up and leaned forward. “Remind me,” he said smiling, running the back of his hand down the side of Graham’s cheek. “What happened again? Please, tell me. In detail.”

Graham smirked, grabbing Alex’s hand. “If I remember correctly, you didn’t knock at all. You are always rude like that.”

“Oh.” Alex’s eyes lit up. “Yes, I remember now. I burst right into your dressing room like a wild man. All dressed up like—”

“—A tart.”

“Yeah, that’s exactly what you said. It offended my sensibilities, I remember now, and I had to teach you a lesson.”

“And then we saw Damon’s feet underneath the door and you said—”

“Don’t make a sound.”

“—I’d never been fucked so hard.”

“And by a lady, nonetheless.” Alex grinned, lifting Graham’s chin with his finger.

“Do you think you can still do it?”

“What do you mean?”

“Do you think you can still keep your mouth shut?”

“Of course.” Graham lowered his chin, looking up through his eyelashes. “I’m a professional.”

“Well then…it’s a challenge.”

Alex enthusiastically pushed Graham backward, causing Graham to sigh loudly. Alex immediately placed a finger on his lips.

“Shhh.”

Leaning down, he began to kiss a trail down Graham’s chest, mouth and hands and tongue making delicate little movements as Graham’s breath began to shallow and his back arched up to meet him.

Without a word, Graham’s hands vied for Alex’s zipper, and within seconds he’d unbuttoned his trousers and pulled Alex’s cock out. Alex’s eyes widened. He almost laughed.

Graham’s mouth parted slightly, and Alex moved to push his jeans down the rest of the way but Graham stopped him.

“No. Clothes stay on. Just like last time.”

Alex smirked at him and slowly removed his hand from his jeans. “No talking, remember?”

Graham looked up at him slyly, pulling his own trousers off and climbing on top of Alex so that both legs were straddling him. Alex ran a finger around the outline of Graham’s erection beneath his red briefs and Graham mewled softly in return. Alex began stroking himself, cock already wet with pre-cum, and Graham using two fingers, moved the fabric of his underwear just enough to ease himself down inch by inch and—*fuck*.

Alex exhaled loudly. Fuck, he was moving fast this time, Alex thought. Graham began to rock his hips back and forth slowly, and after a moment scrunched up his face, clearly uncomfortable, and moved to re-adjust himself.

Alex grinned, grabbing Graham’s hips and thrusting upward without warning. Graham’s mouth fell open in what looked like a mixture of

both pleasure and pain.

“You bastard.” Graham growled, moving forward so that he could take the longer length of Alex’s cock at a less extreme angle and Alex pulled Graham’s head down far enough to sink his teeth into his earlobe.

“I just wanted to make sure you wouldn’t be able to walk in front of Damon tomorrow.” He whispered.

Graham shot him a look of contempt, before placing a finger on his lips. “Shhh.”

Alex smiled, taking Graham’s finger into his mouth and slowly began to push upward, his pace gentler than before. Graham bit down into his neck–hard—hard enough to definitely leave a mark, and Alex hissed in protest.

Alex pulled back, mouthing a “come on” at him and Graham smiled back deviously. *"Bastard,"* Alex thought. Graham was entirely conscious of the fact that Alex would have a hard time hiding that one from Damon tomorrow.

Graham threaded his fingers around the back of Alex’s head, finding their rhythm with the same musician’s intuition he used when they were in the studio. He exhaled sharply, Alex’s teeth were at his ear. First the guitar, then the bass. Up, then down. One, two, three, four. He closed his eyes, picturing himself pinned against a dressing room door, Alex still in tights and a skirt pressed up in-between his legs, red lipstick rings around his cock. Alex took no time at all to get him on his knees—he never did—and when the head of Alex’s cock hit the back of his throat he was almost certain Damon heard him choke through the door.

When Graham finally lifted his eyes, he had no idea how long Damon had been sitting there. Just sitting there on the couch across the room watching them fuck, but he was confident it had to have been for a quite a while, at least, judging by the way Damon’s eyes were pointed like a gun to his forehead.

Every muscle in Graham’s body tightened.

“What’s wrong?” asked Alex, slowing down.

Graham shook his head, still staring at Damon who was quietly surveying Alex fuck him behind Alex’s back.

The room was dark, but Graham could see that Damon's zipper was undone. His right hand was stroking himself as he watched the both of them.

Graham stopped breathing. He wanted to pinch himself. This had to be a dream, he thought. But it wasn't. It couldn't be.

"It's nothing."He said finally, exhaling. He relaxed again, pushing his hips forward and back and returning to their rhythm. After a few beats, he gently pushed Alex backward, urging him to lay down on his back. Alex still hadn't noticed Damon, and he wanted to keep it that way.

Eyes locked with Damon's, he began to fuck Alex slowly.

He swallowed, watching as Damon's hand moved to his zipper, his thumb circling the head of his cock.

Graham tightened his abdominal muscles, lowering down into Alex until Alex was buried in him completely and Graham's mouth dropped open. This hurt, to have Alex's cock all the way inside him, stretching him in ways he wasn't used to, but having Damon watch it was worth every wincing bit of pain.

His hand moved to his twitching cock. Graham leaned back onto his elbows, pivoting his hips so that Damon could get a clearer view of Alex fucking him.

Ever-slowly he began to increase his pace, rocking harder into Alex and Alex, oblivious, happily returned the favor, driving deeper into him. His abdomen tightened again, and he stifled back a moan, rolling his head back, but still inextricably, keeping his eyes locked with Damon's the entire time.

Alex grabbed his hips, fingertips leaving red marks, and Graham almost yelled out as Alex drove up and into him, hard and deep. This silence thing was really becoming a trial of effort on his part.

Chin lifted, Graham could still see Damon stroking himself, watching them—with jealousy, hatred, arousal, everything, every possible emotion--and it took every want and willpower in Graham's being to not call out Alex's name, to scream at the top of his lungs just to show Damon how much he enjoyed Alex fucking him in front of him.

"Gra." Alex said softly, placing a hand on his cheek. "Where are you right now?"

Graham looked down at Alex, shaking his head. “Sorry…just…it’s nothing.” Shifting his position, he pulled Alex backward so that Alex lay on top of him. Alex’s back was still facing Damon. Good, he thought.

“Did I win?”

“I guess. But we’re not done yet. I don’t think we’ve done the memory justice yet, have we?”

“No. But I don’t think I can be quiet anymore.”

“Well, I know a way we could fix that. I seem to remember that I was very good at keeping you quiet last time.” Alex smirked, sticking his finger between Graham’s lips.

“You’re the rudest person I’ve ever met, Alex James.”

Eyes still locked in a gaze with Damon, Graham’s body arched up to press against Alex’s now-very-hard erection with a certain kind of desperation, like a cat asking for its belly to be itched, and an electric shock ran through Alex’s body.

Head swimming, he kissed Graham again, his free hand moving to stroke Graham’s now-more-accessible cock. Digging his fingernails into Alex’s backside, Graham pulled Alex’s head down and whispered into his ear loud enough so that Damon could hear him.

“Fuck me.” Graham’s teeth sunk down into his neck, leaving another very noticeable love bite. “Fuck me hard enough that I won’t be able to hide it from him tomorrow.”

A shiver ran down Alex’s spine and without a word, he motioned for Graham to raise his legs up. He quickly stripped himself of his briefs, and for a moment he swore he could feel the heat of someone or something on his back, drilling into him. He turned his head to look, but Graham’s hand pulled his cheek back.

“You’re wandering, Alex.” Graham said quietly.

Leaning over, Alex reached into the bedside drawer, pulled out a bottle of lube and prepared himself. He looked down at Graham who was now gently stroking himself with one hand, his eyes, unbeknownst to Alex, still locked on Damon.

“Gra. You’re the one wandering.” Alex chuckled, and Graham broke

his gaze with Damon to look at Alex.

He exhaled sharply as Alex inserted his first finger, sliding in and out and gently fucking him. After a beat or so, Alex inserted a second finger and felt Graham's muscles immediately tighten around him.

"Easy. We're almost there." He whispered, kissing Graham's collarbone and making lovebites up and down his neck. He inserted a third finger and Graham tensed up completely, his eyes glazed with lust as he looked up at Alex.

Alex's fingers gently moved in and out of him, his first two fingers making a scissoring motion and causing Graham's face to turn bright red.

Graham looked down at Alex's cock as Alex fingered him, swallowing. "We tried this position before… I don't know."

"Don't worry, I'll be gent...well, gentler this time." Alex finished, kissing him on the forehead. His hand guided his cock to press up against Graham. Breathing out slowly, Alex pushed just the tip of his head inside him. He immediately felt Graham squirm underneath him.

Head spinning, Alex paced himself. Graham was tight, very tight at this angle and it was taking every effort he had in him to pace himself. Ever-slowly, Alex pushed into him, every hot inch near-agonizing as Graham tensed up beneath him. He wanted nothing more than to drive into him, all the way, immediately, but he knew he couldn't.

"Fuck." Alex said underneath his breath. He closed his eyes, touching Graham's cheek with one hand and fingernails pressing into his hip with the other. He placed his thumb between Graham's lips and Graham began gently sucking on it.

Eyes still shut, Alex felt a finger pressed to his lips and opened his eyes to see Graham intently staring at up him. His eyes darted quickly to somewhere behind Alex's left shoulder and then back at Alex before he whispered, "Alex."

"What?"

"Listen. I need you to promise me something."

Alex gave him a strange look.

"...Okay. What?"

“Just for this moment. No matter what happens. Don’t say a word. Don’t say anything. Trust me. Promise me you’ll trust me.”

“Gra, you’re acting really weird--what’s wrong?”

“Just promise me, Alex.”

Suddenly Alex felt someone else’s mouth on his neck and his heart leapt up into his throat.

Hands wrapped around his neck, Damon pressed his tongue in-between Alex’s lips. Alex stared back in shock at glassy blue eyes fettered behind blonde streaks of hair. Damon threaded his fingers into Alex’s scalp, lowering his chin and finally, after all the shock and awe of it, Alex opened his mouth.

Alex tried to think, tried to function, tried to process the situation but to no avail. This was a dream. This was not real. It shouldn’t have been happening for so many reasons, he thought, and yet it was. And suddenly Damon’s hands were on his chest and cock. And suddenly Damon’s teeth were sunk into his neck.

Eyes still closed, Alex tilted his head back and began to slide in and out of Graham again, his cock painfully hard as Graham’s muscles tightened around him. He opened his eyes again and looked down to see Graham sucking on Alex’s two fingers, his eyes fixated on Damon. The combination of all those things alone was almost enough to make him come right there.

Damon hand’s suddenly prodded his arse and Alex’s body tightened up completely. Graham moaned underneath him, looking up at them with glassy eyes.

“Kiss him. Oh god, please.” Graham said lowly, looking toward Damon, and Damon quietly ran his hand down Graham’s cheek. Damon turned to Alex again. Pulling Alex’s chin down, Damon kissed him deeply, his teeth biting down on Alex’s lower lip, and looking at Graham out of the corner of his eye just to see his reaction.

Damon was an immense kisser, Alex thought. In the same way he projected his voice at any given moment during a show to reach the back of an auditorium full of people, he could also twist and turn and manipulate his tongue and teeth into the loveliest of places at will. Damon had passion, yes, that was obvious, Alex thought. But the possessiveness in the way he kissed was entirely another thing.

Graham was breathless at this point, his hand stroking himself slowly, and Alex began to thrust into him again.

Damon pulled back to take a breath, his cheeks flush red and mouth slightly parted, and Alex couldn't help but think about how Damon really looked more like a woman than a man most of the time, the way his perfect lips wrapped around Alex's cock, sucking, licking, looking up at him through blonde hair with round blue eyes. And oh how lovely he looks on his knees, Alex thought, with my cock in his mouth. He wanted nothing more than to come hard into the back of his throat, just to teach him a lesson, just to knock him off his dictatorial throne for once. God.

Damon lingered at his ear, hot breath on his neck, and it made the hairs on the back of Alex's neck stand up.

"You have a very lovely cock." Damon whispered into Alex's ear, stroking the base of his erection and suddenly Alex's skin felt electric again.

Stymied, Alex's breath caught in his throat as Damon pushed him off Graham, backwards onto the bed and, in the most graceful of ways, climbed on top him and began to suck his cock.

Every nerve-ending in Alex's body felt like it was on fire, going from Graham to Damon so suddenly, to watching Graham behind them, slowly stroking himself with his eyes glossed over, just about to lose himself. Soft blonde strands fell forward onto his stomach and Alex interweaved his fingers into Damon's hair, abdomen tightening as Damon's washing machine tongue made excruciatingly lovely crocheting movements over the head of his cock. He moaned as Damon's tongue did a dozen half circles and he began to fuck Damon's mouth slowly, his cock pressing against the back of his throat.

Then suddenly, without a word Damon stopped. He pulled back, and Alex opened his mouth to protest until he saw Damon undoing his belt, his fingers prying away at his trousers and shirt until he was completely naked.

Alex wanted to pinch himself.

Damon looked back at Graham, lifting his chin with his finger and kissing him deeply. Damon whispered something Alex couldn't hear into Graham's ear, and after a beat or so, Graham hesitantly nodded his head in agreement.

Graham looked like he was already on the edge of coming at this point, his hand had barely having touched his cock in the last five minutes. Just seeing them together like this had to be something for him, Alex thought. He couldn't blame him, he could only imagine what sort of head fuck it had to be to see the two people who fought over you turned on by one another.

Alex's cock was bright, bright red now, hard as a rock and burgeoning, and he closed his eyes. Altogether this was too much for him. Too much even for having had a nice fuzzy hit earlier, which was for all intents and purposes, was definitely wearing the fuck off at this point.

God, he wanted Damon. He wanted him blisteringly so, to turn him over and teach him a lesson, to fuck him so hard it would wipe that smirk off his pretty boy face once and for all.

Damon arched his arse up, spreading his legs and Alex felt his cock twitch. He prodded his finger against Damon's arse and Damon inhaled sharply.

"Oh fuck, Alex. I've wanted you to fuck me for so long. Please." Damon said quietly into his ear. "Please, I need this."

He pulled Alex toward him, kissing him deeply, his cheeks flushed red with anticipation. Damon glanced toward Graham and then back at Alex. "Fuck me like how you fuck him."

Not needing another excuse, Alex buried his face between Damon's legs, his tongue prodding at Damon's pink arse. Alex had fucked lots of pretty boys before, but this, this was different. To get back at Damon after all these years, after all his maniacal careerist control trips with the band, his constant condescension, and knowing now that all this time Damon just desperately wanted Alex to bend him over fuck him—it was too much.

Alex inserted his tongue and Damon moaned loudly, his back arching up.

"Oh fuck, Alex."

Alex tongued him again, this time inserting his forefinger and Damon shuddered underneath him.

"Jesus." Damon exhaled loudly. "Stop teasing and just fuck me already."

Alex licked his lips, pulling back and positioning the head of his cock. He was trying to hold himself back, to pause and think of something horrible, because just the thought of fucking Damon—which, until a few minutes ago he'd thought was entirely implausible—was making him want to come right there and then.

Slowly he pushed into Damon, inch-by-inch, and Damon moaned loudly underneath him.

Damon was tight—fuck—tighter than Graham; and it was crystal clear to Alex now, excruciatingly clear, that Damon not only has his way in the studio, but in the bedroom too, and never the other way around.

Damon pushed his hips back, willing Alex to go faster and deeper and Alex held fast, admiring the way his cock slid in and out of Damon's tiny pink arse.

Damon had no problem taking him all the way in, not in the way Graham did, and Alex couldn't help but think that if Damon was in pain—he had to be—then he was enjoying it.

"Harder." Damon taunted him, and Alex obliged, pushing into him roughly.

"Fuck me harder, Alex. Jesus Christ." Damon repeated, arching his neck back. "I'm not a fucking girl."

Alex stopped breathing, grinding against Damon and pulling his neck back, pulling at his hair.

Damon moaned his name loudly, and Alex heard Graham exhale loudly behind him.

Alex wasn't prepared for what happened next. Damon pushed him off in a matter seconds, flipping him around and shoving him down roughly into the bed. Alex winced, pinned between Damon's body and the bed.

"What the fuck, Damon–"

Damon grabbed both of their shirts off the bedside table and began to wrap Alex's wrists, securely winding the fabric around both hands and twice for good measure around the headboard. He pulled on both knots to make sure they were tight enough.

Alex winced, feeling the cotton of the shirts chaff against the skin of

his wrists.Then without warning, Damon spread his legs and drove into him.

Alex yelled out, half from pain and the other half from surprise. His head was pinned against the pillow, so he couldn't see anything. His trapped hands gripped at the headboard with white knuckles. Damon slid out, then in, fucking him roughly, almost too roughly, and for minute Alex wondered how difficult it would be to try to throw him off of him him.

Turning his head, he looked up at Graham who was sitting still, his eyes locked on Damon. There was certain sort of fear in his eyes that Alex couldn't place.

Damon's fingernails dragged down the skin of his back, and Alex squeezed his eyes shut, trying to catch his breath. In a way, it felt good he thought, even if it was a bit unexpected. Every hair was standing up on the back of his neck as Damon gripped his hips.

He watched as Graham got up from the bed, turning his face away from both of them.

"Gra."

Graham stood with his back to them.

"Gra, sit down." Damon said lowly, and Graham hesitantly turned around, sitting back down on the bed.

"Look at me."

Graham continued to look down at the floor.

"Look at me." Damon repeated. Raising just his eyes, Graham gave Damon a sideways look. He swallowed slowly.

Nails digging into his sides, Damon finally came, violently pushing into him one last time and then pulling out. He fell backwards on the bed, sighing, his skin stricken with sweat.

Alex closed his eyes, his body deflating into the bed. He couldn't process what had just happened; he wasn't sure he ever would. He felt Damon untie his hands, and immediately they dropped to his sides like heavy weights.

After a minute or so he rolled onto his back. Damon was already all

over Graham. Of course, Alex thought. He noticed that Graham's face was void of color at this point. He looked as though he was about to be ill. And for the first time that night, Alex realized that he had just been a pawn in someone else's game, for better or worse.

Alex sat up, grabbing his trousers and shirt off the floor. When he left the room, Graham didn't even notice, he was too busy having Damon pin him against the mattress, too busy having Damon shove his tongue down his throat, too busy to reconcile whatever mix of fear and lust Alex had seen in his eyes earlier.

Damon had won, Alex thought. Like always.

As he always did.

Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

> Posting this chapter a bit early since the holidays are next week. Thank you again for following along, and for all the kudos and comments. It means a lot to me. xx I'm relieved I made it this far. I started this fic in 2009, and I've got Damon singing "it's looks like we've finally made it to the end" in my head right now (well not THE end, but end of angst I suppose, haha.)

“This is *really* good cheese.” Alex said, biting down into large slice of aged cheddar he’d grabbed from the hotel’s lunch plate. “Try this, Gra.”

Graham scrunched up his face. “No, thanks.” He tapped his fingers on the patio table.

“Oh come on, live a little.”

“I feel puffy today.”

Alex slapped him on the shoulder. “You’re as skinny as Iggy Pop, what are you talking about?”

Graham eyed Alex’s mimosa for a minute too long and then looked up.

“What?”

“I said you’re as skinny as Iggy—oh.” Alex stopped, nodding toward Damon as he approached their table. “Great,” His smile disappeared from his face. “The man of the hour has arrived.”

“Good morning.” Damon said lowly, looking at the both of them.

“Morning.” Alex said, making a point to leave the first word off. “Take a seat.”

“I would, but I believe you’re in my seat, Alex.” Damon smiled acrimoniously. The rest of the chairs surrounding the table were vacant.

Alex bit down hard on bottom lip. He slapped both of his hands against the tabletop, and stood up from the table. He shot Damon a tight-lipped smile. “Sure.” He looked at Graham.

“I’m finished anyway. I’ll see you later, Gra.” He added, “At practice.”

Graham nodded, still staring down at the tablecloth. Damon quickly took his seat beside Graham, sighing and stretching his arms out. He scratched the back of Graham’s neck lovingly.

“I didn’t see you this morning when I woke up. How did you sleep?” Damon asked.

Graham didn’t want to talk about last night. He wanted to scrub it out of his brain, stick his brain in battery acid and start all over.

“Great.” Graham said quietly, still looking down at the table. He pushed his food around with his fork.

“You look a bit under the weather.”

“I’m fine.” Graham said a bit too loudly, which caused some of the other hotel patrons to stare at them.

Damon removed his hand from Graham’s neck. “Okay…”

Graham suddenly stood up from his chair. “I’ve got to use the loo.”

“Wait. One minute.” Damon grabbed him by the arm. “What are your plans today?”

Graham scrunched up his nose. “I dunno...be here.” He shrugged and shook his head. “What do you mean?”

“I mean, where are you going today?”

Graham looked annoyed. “Damon…”

Damon’s mouth turned into a straight line. He tightened his grip on Graham’s arm. “I don’t want you seeing Alex anymore.”

“What do you mean, not see him?” Graham laughed sarcastically. “We’re in a fucking band together, Damon.”

“You know what I mean.”

“No, I don’t know what you mean. Tell me, Damon.”

Damon’s jaw tightened. “I don’t want you fucking him anymore.”

Graham wrenched his arm out of Damon’s grip. “You’re fucking crazy,

do you know that?" He said bitterly. Turning, he started to walk back toward the hotel.

Once inside, he made a beeline for the elevator to his room. He couldn't believe that this was what Damon had become. He never expected him to ever be this possessive, and he couldn't be certain anymore whether it was from the heroin withdrawals or something a lot more insidious than that.

Earlier that morning, before breakfast, Alex had pulled him aside. "We need to talk," he'd said.

"Look," he said. "I love you, Gra. I really do. You're my favorite person in the whole wide world, you know that?"

Graham silently stared back at him, his eyes darting back and forth over Alex's face. "What are you trying to say, Alex?"

Alex looked down at the ground. "I can't…" He sighed, scratching his head. "I can't do this anymore."

"What do you mean?"

Alex finally lifted his head to look at him, his eyes now glassy. "Look, I know you love Damon. I get that, I always have. But last night, Gra…" Alex shook his head, looking off into the distance. "That was fucked up."

"Alex—" Graham began, but Alex cut him off.

"Damon is fucking crazy." Alex reached into his back pocket for a lighter and a cigarette. Lighting it, he looked up toward the sky, then back down at Graham. "And I don't know if he's hurting you or abusing you or what, but I just can't...I can't do this anymore. I can't be a part of this little mind game you both are playing with each other."

"Alex, listen to me—"

"I can't be with you, in that way, anymore. I want to, but I can't. Not with him around." Alex laughed sadly. "And it really fucking tears me apart, you know?"

Alex looked up at him, his lips drawn into a straight line. Graham could see that he was fighting back tears.

“Alex.” Graham pulled him into his arms, holding him tightly. He felt Alex’s heart beat against his chest. “Alex, I’m sorry. I’m really sorry.”

Graham pulled back, his eyes also now wet. “I don’t know what to do anymore. I don’t know. Damon didn’t use to be this…” He searched for the right word to say. “Possessive.”

“I know.”

Graham rubbed at his eyes. “Christ, Alex. I feel like I’m...stuck.”

Alex put a hand on his shoulder. “You need to get away from him. You need to get away from him and you need to get help, Gra. Real help. For your daughter’s sake. For Anna’s sake.”

Alex had hit a pain point, a real and raw one, and Graham turned away from him.

Alex touched him on the shoulder. “Look, I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have mentioned them.”

“It’s okay.” Graham’s shoulders sunk. “It’s the truth.”

“You haven’t told Damon yet, have you?” Alex asked quietly.

Graham shook his head. “No.”

“You need to tell him now, Graham. He’s going to be even more pissed off when you tell him you didn’t come here for him. And I don’t...” Alex sighed. “I don’t want to know how he’s going to react after seeing him last night.”

Graham shook the thought of his conversation with Alex out of his head. It didn’t matter now. He would deal with it later. He punched in the phone number on the telephone in his room.

“Hello?” A young woman’s voice answered on the other end.

“Hey. It’s me.” Graham said quietly. “Sorry I haven’t called, things have been...busy. How are you?”

“I’m fine.” Anna said softly. “I miss you. It’s been tough without you being here.”

“I know. I’m sorry.”

“I’m getting sick every day now, it’s awful.”

“What did the doctor say?”

“He said that everything’s normal. Healthy.” She paused and there was a long silence. “So…when are you coming home?”

“Four more weeks, I think.”

“That’s a long time. The baby’s due around then.”

“I know. I’m sorry.” Graham was starting to feel like a broken record. “I’ll make it back in time. We just have to get the record done. It’s the label, they—”

“I understand.” Anna interrupted. “It’s okay.” She sighed. “Listen, I’ll talk to you later, okay? I have to go see my mum today.”

“Okay.” Graham pressed his fingers to his temples.

“I love you.”

“I love you too.”

Graham hung up the phone. He covered his hands with his face, rubbing at his eyes.

“Who were you talking to?” A voice said behind his back, and he nearly jumped out of his skin.

He looked over his shoulder to see Damon standing in the middle of the room, his face illegible.

“How did you get in here?” Graham stared back at him, wide-eyed.

“Your door was unlocked.” Damon said in a low voice. “Who were you talking to?”

Graham shook his head, breaking eye contact. “It’s none of your business, okay?”

“Apparently it is, because you’ve been lying to me about something.”

Graham shifted on the bed, sighing loudly.

“So what were you really doing the year you were gone, Graham? Tell me.”

“Damon, I don’t want to talk about this, please.”

Damon's eyes were drilling holes into his forehead.

"Okay, fine." Graham sighed. "Look, I...I met someone. I met someone and I fell in love with them, okay? That's why I didn't answer your letter when you sent it. Things were...complicated."

"Is it a man or woman?"

"Christ, Damon." Graham laughed bitingly. "A woman. She's a woman."

"So why did you come here then? Were you just trying to fuck with my head again?"

"No," Graham rubbed his face with his hands. "I came here because...I wanted...I don't know anymore..." Graham trailed off.

"Stop dodging and just tell me the truth."

After a moment, Graham looked up at him with glassy eyes. "I had to come here. I had to get better...for my daughter."

Suddenly it looked like a train going a hundred miles an hour had hit Damon. It wasn't the answer he'd had been expecting, Graham knew that much.

"You have a daughter?" Damon repeated, as though he didn't believe him. "You're kidding me."

"I'm not."

"Wait, so, you have a daughter and you're fucking two separate men at the same time."

"I'm *going* to have a daugher, and yeah, well, you're not exactly one to judge, Damon." Graham replied caustically. "You were fucking me the entire time you were with Justine and Jamie."

Damon's facial muscles tightened. He considered Graham with dull, blue-gray eyes. After a few moments of silence, he shook his head. "So do you love her?"

"Yes."

"Fucking hell." Damon slammed his fist into the wall and Graham flinched.

“Damon, I—”

Damon broke eye contact, staring into the wall. “I just wanted to be with you, Graham. I just wanted to be with you, for once. Just you and me. This one time. That’s all I ever wanted.”

“I know. I’m sorry. I didn’t plan for this to happen.”

“You know, the first time we were together you left me alone in my bed.” Damon said plainly.

“And you never said a word to me after that. You left me confused. I was young. I didn’t even know I liked men back then. I didn’t, honestly. I only liked you. I only ever liked you.”

“Damon—”

“And then, then you go and try to off yourself, and I do everything, *everything* to try to get you back, to try to make things right.”

“Day--”

“And then,” Damon laughed sarcastically. “Then you go and disappear again, and I think I’ve lost you for real this time. So I try to get better, I find someone. And then you come back into my life out of nowhere, after not giving a shit, and you ruin that for me too.”

“Damon—”

“I hate you.”

“Damon, please let me talk—”

“I fucking hate you.”

Damon turned to leave.

“Damon, don’t go. Please. Let’s talk about this.”

Damon’s back was turned to him as he faced the door. He shook his head. “Why bother?”

Graham’s eyes welled up as he watched Damon walk out of his room.

**

Graham stared down at the small white pills cupped in his palm.

There were tiny little perfect numbers printed on them. His thumb brushed the label of the antidepressant drugs his doctor had given him. *Take 2 tablets by mouth every day. Do not drink alcoholic beverages while taking this medicine.*

He placed the pills in his mouth, and tilted his head back. The taxi jolted suddenly to the left, snapping him back to reality.

“How are you doing today?” His taxi-driver asked. He was wearing a white suit and shoes, which Graham thought was odd.

Graham forced a smile. “Fine, thanks.”

Suddenly a familiar song started playing on the radio. The driver turned up the knob and Graham felt his stomach roll over again, as it always did.

I ain't happy, I'm feeling glad, I got sunshine in a bag

“Have you heard about this band?” The driver looked at him through the rear-view mirror. “Gorillaz. They’re like a cartoon band I guess? It’s crazy. No one knows who they are. I have my theories though...”

I'm useless but not for long, My future is coming on

There was moment of awkward silence before Graham decided he had to be polite and replied, “Yeah?”

“I think, you know the band Blur? I think it’s that bloke, wosshisname?”

“Damon Albarn.” Graham said without passion.

“ *Yeah* , that’s right. Looks like we’re here.” The driver pulled off to the side of the road, and Graham burst out of the side door as quickly as he could manage. He grabbed his guitar case and forced a polite smile. “Thanks.”

He couldn’t stand that fucking song. It’d been playing on the radio for eight solid months now. At the grocer’s, at the pub, literally everywhere he went that song followed him unendingly—a constant reminder of how Damon was moving on, moving up.

He was late, again, and as soon as he walked into the studio he made sure to not make eye contact with anyone. He quickly unfastened the clasps on his guitar case and pulled his guitar over his head.

“Graham.” He felt someone touch him on the shoulder. It was Alex. He had a strange, worried look in his eyes. “Graham, can I talk to you for moment?” He added, “In private.”

Graham looked back down at his guitar case, making sure he had everything he needed. “I’d love to Alex, but I’m running a bit late at the moment, you know? Can we talk after?”

Alex shook his head. “No, we need to talk now. Before you go in there.”

Graham furrowed his brow. “What’s going on, Alex? You’re acting really weird.”

Alex grabbed him tightly by the arm and tugged him toward the back of the room.

“Okay.” Alex sighed, putting his hands on Graham’s shoulders.

“What do you need to tell me, Alex?” Graham asked, looking a bit impatient.

“Just listen for minute. Don’t freak out, okay?” Alex tilted his chin down, looking him straight in the eye. “Promise me you won’t freak out.”

Graham shook his head and shrugged his shoulders. "Okay.”

“Look, Dave, Damon and I...we all had a meeting this morning.”

“Without me?”

“Just listen. We all had a meeting and we took a vote and Dave and Damon, they decided…” Alex paused. “They decided that they want you out of the band.”

Graham’s mouth dropped open. “What?”

“I voted against it, Graham. I wanted you to stay. But it was two people against one in there, you have to understand. There was nothing I could do.”

“What about me? What about my vote?” Graham pointed to himself. “What about my fucking feelings?”

“It doesn’t work that way, Graham.” Alex sighed, patting him on the shoulders. “Look, you have to understand that it hasn’t been easy to

be around you these last few weeks, you know?"

"No, I don't understand, Alex. Tell me."

"Gra, you can't just go around making caustic remarks while we're recording, especially making jokes about Gorillaz like that in front of Damon. I saw an article where I think you said you hated Gorillaz?" Alex shook his head at him.

"I didn't say—"

"Look, I know we all had a laugh about it, but you know how thin-skinned Damon is, he doesn't take well to that sort of thing."

Alex looked down at the ground. "And you've been late to practice. Every. Single. Day. Graham. We've have nothing done on this album and the record executives have been breathing down Damon's neck every time you're not here."

"Alex, I've been in and out of the doctor. And Anna's fighting me for custody of Pepper...it's been hell. This year has been absolute hell."

"Look, I know, I get it. I support you, Graham. But nothing I said to them in there could change their minds." Alex massaged his shoulders. "I just wanted to tell you, you know, before you went in there. It's not personal, Graham."

"Oh, fuck-all it isn't personal." Graham said bitterly. "This is just Damon trying to get back at me."

Alex took a deep breath. "Okay, are you ready? They're waiting for you in there."

"I don't want to talk to them." Graham shook his head. After a pause he said, "Actually, you know what? No. I want to see Damon say it right to my face. I want to see him be a man about it."

Graham stormed into recording studio, ripping the door open with his hands. He saw Dave and Damon staring back at him, their hands between their legs, twiddling their thumbs.

"Graham." Damon smiled weakly. "Sit down, we need to talk to you." He said quietly.

"I'd rather stand, thanks." Graham's jaw tightened.

Damon took a deep breath. "Graham, the band and I have talked, and

we—”

“Don’t bother. Alex already told me. You’re kicking me out of the band.” Graham gritted his teeth. “I just wanted to see if you had the balls to say it to my face.”

Damon’s face turned a bit white.

“Tell me, how in the hell are you going to record an album without a guitarist? Are you replacing me with someone from your secret projects?”

Dave spoke up finally, “Damon’s going to play guitar.”

Graham laughed incredulously. He pointed at Damon. “Him? Playing guitar? That’s the best fucking joke you’ve ever made, Dave.”

Graham turned to face Damon. He noticed a certain dullness in Damon’s eyes. Apathy, maybe.

“And you, you goddamn bastard.”

He felt someone’s hands on his shoulders, pulling him back. It was Alex again.

“Graham,” He whispered into his ear. “Just let it go, okay?”

Alex grabbed Graham’s hand and started pulling him toward the door. Graham took one last look at Damon, just sitting there on his lofty chair—cold, aloof. He looked like some haughty king sitting atop his throne. And that’s exactly what he’d always wanted, wasn’t it? Graham thought. To have control.

**

Chapter 17

Damon was gone, but his shadow was still there.

Graham could count the number of times he'd thought about his best friend in last six years on one hand. The last time he'd seen him was at Alex's wedding. They'd both stood there, with their thumbs in their pockets, he and Damon exchanging some forced niceties for Alex's sake, and then the party ended and that was it. It was over. Maybe it was because it didn't matter anymore, or maybe it was because he was sober now, but in an ordinary and boring way he'd become quite normal, quite well-adjusted, and somehow all of it seemed like a dream to him now.

That's why, every time Damon's lawyer's papers came in the mail, he felt mostly nothing. His entire memory of Damon Albarn had been replaced with the same apathy he'd associated with his face the day Graham had left the band. Now they only corresponded through phlegmatic bits of paper and legal speak, hiding behind their walls of lawyers. The irony of it all was that Damon, for whatever reason, made a point to send him tickets in the post every time Gorillaz or any of his other bands were playing in town. But combined with the impassive letters from his lawyer, he had always found Damon's gesture to be bittersweet, to say the least.

Today though, today was different. Another padded envelope from Damon had arrived in the post, and as usual Graham had set it down on the end of the kitchen table not wanting to look at it. It sat there for a couple days until, while sipping his morning tea, Graham finally noticed that the address on the front was not written in Damon's handwriting.

He took a deep breath, picked up the envelope, and tore the back open. Two tickets, a plastic badge, and oddly, a handwritten note had been included. Curiosity getting the better of him, Graham unfolded the piece of paper with cautious hands.

Graham,

You don't know who I am, but I know who you are. Damon didn't want me to send this. I promised him I wouldn't, but I did anyway. I don't know you at all, and I know this is a lot to ask coming from a total stranger, but I think Damon really needs to see you. He won't admit it, but I know he needs it. He's been having a hard time lately, and I think based on what

he's said in passing, it's because he never really reconciled with you.

I hope you read this, and if you do decide to come to the show, please know it would mean the world to Damon for him to see you again.

Best Regards,

—Suzi

Graham stared down at the two tickets in his lap. The printed text on the front read: *Africa Express: Koko, Camden Town.* Graham checked his watch. The date for the gig was today, in just a few hours. He'd barely make it if he left now. Closing the letter, he stalled, debating whether or not it would be a good idea to go. After all, he and Damon hadn't seen each other in years. They had to be different people now. Another minute of tense contemplation passed then, quickly checking himself in the mirror, he snatched his coat off the rack and headed out the door.

**

It was a remarkably smogless day for October, and Graham hid his eyes under his hands as he walked down the streets of Camden Town. He'd forgotten his sunglasses, again. But he was wearing his favorite specs—the ones he knew would impress Damon—despite telling himself again and again not to worry about that sort of thing.

As soon as he opened the door to the venue, a cold rush of air swept past him and he shivered. A bunch of crew members were running all over the place like scattered ants, and Graham felt his stomach drop to his knees. He was here, finally, his heart gripped with anxiety. Now that he was in the throes of it, of having to actually talk to Damon face-to-face, he wasn't sure if this was a good idea after all.

One of the crew members stopped him. "Sir, I'm sorry but you can't be back here. If you have a VIP pass we'll call for you in a couple of hours."

"I'm looking for Damon Albarn."

"Are you a fan?"

"In a way," Graham joked, laughing. "No, I'm a friend." It felt weird to him to say that out loud after all these years.

"What's your name? I'll let him know you're here."

“Graham Coxon.”

Graham suddenly didn’t know where to put his hands. He folded his arms, then realizing that may look too defensive, committed instead to sticking his hands into the pockets of his long, trench coat jacket and began nervously rocking back and forth on his heels.

A few minutes later he saw Damon appear from behind the curtain, and immediately his knees wanted to buckle; he wanted to turn away and run.

“Graham!” Damon had a wide grin on his face as he approached him. “It’s Graham Coxon!”

Graham smiled nervously. “In the flesh.”

Without any hesitation, Damon pulled him into a large hug. He was grinning from ear to ear. “My God, I didn’t expect to see you here.”

“Well, I was in the neighborhood…so, you know.” Graham replied coyly, both making and breaking eye contact intermittently.

“How did you—how did you find out about this?”

Graham scratched the top of his head. “Um, well, Suzi mailed me.”

Damon shook his head and smiled. “Oh, Suzi. Yeah, that sounds like her.” He patted Graham on the back and swung his arm around his shoulder.

Graham felt his face starting to get hot.

“So, how have you been? God, it’s been what…six years?” Damon asked. His eyes were gleaming.

Graham smirked. “Eight if you count the awkward parts, I guess.”

“How is Pepper?”

Graham’s eyes lit up. He was relieved to have a change of topic.

“Oh she’s great, really. She just turned eight.” Graham shook his head. “She’s so smart and creative, it’s unbelieveable. You’d have to see her.”

“I’d love to.” Damon said, beaming. “In fact, it’d be great for her to meet Missy, I know they’d get along.” He looked down at his watch.

“You know what, I have some time before I have to be back here. What do you say we go sit down somewhere and get something to eat, yeah?”

Graham nodded. He had been grinning the entire time without realizing it. “Yeah, that sounds great. Let’s do it.”

**

A cold October breeze swept past them as Damon pushed open the door to the bakery. The familiar jingle of bells against the door made Graham strangely feel like he was back home again. It reminded him of when he and Damon were kids, and every weekend they would run a mile to the bake shop to buy buns with coins they’d managed to salvage or steal from Hazel.

“Hello. How can I help you?”

Damon puffed his cheeks out. “Oh, I think we were looking for Eccles cake, yeah?” He turned toward Graham with a sparkle in his eye.

He remembered too , Graham thought. He nodded, smiling. “Yeah, it has to be Eccles cake. Definitely.”

“How many?”

“Oh…” Damon leaned against the countertop. “Well that’s a hard question.” He glanced at Graham, and then back at the Eccles cake. “How many do you have? I think we’ll take all of them.”

“All of them?” The bake shop employee repeated with wide eyes.

Damon raised an eyebrow and looked toward Graham. “Yeah, why not?”

The employee blinked and laughed. “Okay, if that’s what you want.” She proceeded to reach into the display and pull all of the Eccles cakes out. Stuffing them all into a bag—and there were a lot, way too many to eat Graham thought—she swiped Damon’s card and handed him the bag. “That’s fifteen Eccles cakes. I hope you gentlemen enjoy them.”

“Good God, Damon. What are we going to do with fifteen Eccles cakes?”

Damon laughed, holding the doorway open for him. “Well, eat them

of course!”

Graham pursed his lips, trying to mask his smile in front of Damon. Damon sat down next to the doorway, stretching his legs and arms out, and handed him an Eccles cake.

Graham sighed loudly and then laughed.

Damon raised an eyebrow. “What are you laughing at?”

Graham smiled and stared down at the concrete. “You.”

“Why me?”

Graham was still too shy to make eye contact. “You haven’t changed, is all. The way you—” Graham imitated the way Damon had extended his arms and legs out seconds earlier. “You still look like the Damon I knew in college.”

Damon laughed, looking down at the ground. “Yeah, I suppose I’ve become a bit more childish in my old age.”

“You also smile a lot more than you used to.”

Damon self-consciously forced a smile back. “Yeah? I was about to say the same thing about you.”

“Well then, I guess we’re both a bit childish now.” Graham kicked at the ground with his shoe.

Damon inhaled and exhaled slowly. “You know, I meant to say this a long time ago. But I didn’t--” He paused. “I guess I didn’t really know how to put it in a letter.”

“Yeah?” Graham replied softly, looking up at him.

“I’m really sorry about what happened with…” Damon paused, as though looking for the right words to say. “...you know, the band and all.” He leaned back and looked up. “I just think, things were a bit weird between us back then, you know?”

Graham stroked his chin as though he were deep in thought. “You know...for the first couple of years I kept thinking about that thing you said to me the day before I left for school.” He glanced up at Damon. “Do you remember? That promise we made, about never splitting up?”

Damon nodded and smiled sadly. “Yeah.”

“I remember you said, verbatim,” Graham raised his voice, laughing. “That you’d *never* go solo, and you also made me promise that no matter how terrible we were to each other we would never stop being friends.”

“Christ,” Damon laughed and sighed. “I was an idyllic child, wasn’t I?”

“Truly,” Graham remarked, smirking. “But then I thought, you know, we never really broke up, not officially. We just sort of stopped talking to each other.”

“That’s true.” Damon nodded understandingly. “I’d never thought about it like that.”

Damon kicked his foot out onto the steps, looking up at the sky. “You know…I never could replace you, Gra. No matter how hard I tried to.” He smiled sadly. “And believe me, I did try. A couple of times.”

Graham felt his chest tighten in that familiar way, like his heart had too much weight on it. “I’m really sorry, Day. I’m sorry for all the years I gave you hell. I should have been there for you, and I wasn’t.”

Damon looked at him with soft eyes. “It’s okay. I mean, we weren’t talking. And you had a lot going on that I didn’t know about, and I didn’t find out about it until much later.” He shifted his body to face Graham.

“You know, I was really proud of you when I found out that you got help. And that you still stayed sober after…you know…all of that.” Damon trailed off.

Graham could tell that the subject was still sensitive to him.

“That’s no small feat. That takes a lot of guts.”

Graham laughed sarcastically. “Yeah, and a lot of money.”

Damon placed a hand on his shoulder and Graham immediately felt his heart tumble inside his chest.

“It’s water under the bridge, Gra. Really.”

Graham laughed underneath his breath. ”You know, to be honest, it’s been so long that it feels like a dream to me now. Like none of it was real.”

Damon leaned back on his elbows, picking at the grass underneath them. “Yeah. I know what you mean.”

Graham suddenly felt an anxious need to stretch his hand out and touch Damon, but he knew that it wouldn’t be appropriate.

Damon cleared his throat. “You know, how weird would it be if we just got back together?”

Graham nearly spit out his Eccles cake. “You mean, be in Blur again?” He repeated, just to correct him. Damon didn’t get the cue.

“Yeah...” Damon smiled and shrugged his shoulders. “I mean, why not?”

“Wait, are you finally admitting that you need a guitarist after all?” Graham smirked.

“Tosser.” Damon grinned and threw a handful of grass at him. “What did you think of my guitar anyway?”

Graham lowered his chin and peered up at him. “Do you really want to know?”

“Yes.”

“Are you sure?”

Damon laughed. “Jesus, Graham, just say it already.”

“It was good,” Graham paused. “I think it would have been a lot better had I done it.”

“Thanks a lot, arsehole.” Damon fussed with Graham’s hair. “There’s the little egotist I missed so much.” He paused. “I listened to some of your stuff too, you know.”

“Oh really? I’m sure I want to hear your opinion now after what I said.” Graham replied smugly. “So? What did you think?”

“Well you know, Happiness In Magazines and Love Travels were really solid.” Damon cleared his throat. “But personally found your older ones a bit more interesting to be honest.”

Graham tried to keep from grinning. “Interesting.” He smirked. “Why, because you thought they were all about you?”

Damon smiled back. “Well, maybe. I didn’t want to assume.”

“Ah, there’s the little narcissist I missed.” Graham replied cheekily. Without thinking, he briefly touched Damon on the shoulder and regretted it immediately.

The smile quickly disappeared from Damon’s face. He looked down at his wrist watch. “You know, I’d better get back. I was enjoying talking to you so much that I lost track of time there for a little bit.”

Damon looked at him softly. “It was really nice catching up with you, Gra.” He bit his upper lip. “Maybe I…maybe I’ll see you after the show, yeah? We can go out somewhere and talk a little more.”

Graham nodded quietly. “That would be great, yeah.”

“Great. I’ll meet you backstage after? Suzi gave you a pass, right?”

“Yep.”

“Okay, I’ll see you in a few hours then.” Damon smiled at him—a warm smile, not a forced one, Graham noticed—and turned to walk back to the venue.

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When Damon finally stepped off stage, he looked as though he’d just gone swimming. Wordlessly, Graham handed him a towel and Damon muttered an incoherent thanks.

“You look exhausted.”

“I am.” Damon smiled blearily.

“Are you sure you still want to go out? We can do it another time.”

Damon shook his head. “No, no. I want to go out with you.”

Graham helped towel off Damon’s back. He scrunched up his nose. “This is just like the old days, yeah?”

“How so?”

“Wiping buckets of sweat off each other after gigs.”

“Just gigs?” Damon joked as he bent down to change his shoes, and Graham blushed.

“Alright, where do you want to go?” Damon pulled his wet jumper over his head, and Graham made a point to look away. “You know Camden Town the best.”

Graham looked at his watch. “Well, most of the good coffee shops are closed…we could go to the pub I suppose.”

“Nah,” Damon scrunched up his face. I’d rather not. I already had a few backstage.”

Graham’s eyes moved tentatively to Damon’s bare chest. “You could come over to my place for tea, I guess?”

Damon raised his eyes. “Is that alright? You don’t have a missus waiting up for you, do you?” He grinned in the same mischievous way Graham remembered him doing when they were kids sneaking up to his room while Hazel was home.

“Not at the moment.”

“Then that sounds great.” Damon replied, finally pulling a fresh t-shirt on. Thank God, Graham thought to himself.

Damon patted him on the back. “Let me call Suzi, let her know I’ll be home late, and we can go yeah?”

“Look at you, so domestic now.” Graham taunted.

“Yeah, it’s the unexciting life.” Damon looked up at him with a gleam in his eye. “Go to bed early, watch the telly, have a cuppa.”

“It’s certainly not the Damon Albarn: Britpop Heartthrob I used to know.”

“Oh, well. Things change, you know. I still have my vices.” Damon pulled what looked like a rolled cigarette out of his pocket.

“Is that what I think it is?”

Damon lit the blunt and shot him a sideways smile. “Suzi doesn’t like it, so I have to get my opportunities in when I can.” He offered the blunt to Graham.

Graham shook his head and laughed. “No, thanks. Not really my thing.”

“I admire your resilience, Graham Coxon.” Damon massaged his

shoulders, and Graham felt his heart beat faster. “Alright, let’s get out of here, yeah?”

Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

> This chapter was inspired by the song 'This Is The Last Time' by The National. I've had this scene in my head for a while now, but never had the context to write it until now. This is the article I referenced for the life event Graham talks about near the end (spoilers). Thanks for following along as always, we're almost there. xx

As soon as they stepped into his place Graham immediately realized he had a problem.

“I don’t have a couch.”

“How do you not have a couch?” Damon asked. He looked as though he were about to laugh.

Graham had a nervy look on his face. “Um, well I had painters and decorators over last week and the chairs and sofa didn’t match, so…I got rid of them.” He touched his chin. “…And I haven’t bought new ones yet.”

“This is a problem how then?”

“Well all I have for us to sit on is my bed, really.” Graham bit his lip. “Isn’t that weird though?”

Damon laughed. “Graham, we slept on a tour bus together with our arms and legs in each other’s laps. And I had Alex’s giant fucking feet up my nose. Sitting on your bed is not weird.”

“Okay, I’ll make some tea then.”

Graham scrambled toward the kitchen with all his typical nervous neuroses on display, and Damon followed him in tow. Graham’s place was, to Damon’s surprise, very well-kept aside from the lack of furniture. Not at all like he remembered it, with records and books and shoes and tea cups scattered across the floor like an absurd obstacle course.

“Your place looks nice. Very…grown-up.” Damon taunted, and Graham shot him a contemptuous side glance.

“That’s mostly Essy’s doing, not me. She cleans up all my messes.”

“Essy?”

“My girlfriend.”

Damon raised his eyebrows. He stuck his hands in his pockets. “Oh.”

Graham looked out of the corner of his eye to see if he could gauge Damon's reaction. Then, carefully pouring the liquid into each of the cups, he handed Damon his tea.

“Thanks.”

Graham scratched the back of his head, looking more nervous than ever. “So, um, the bedroom’s upstairs, I'll show you.”

Stepping onto the staircase, Damon could now clearly see the invisible line dividing Graham’s mess and Essy’s tidiness. The second floor looked like a bunch of students had been living in it. All of the books and cups and guitars Damon remembered were scattered around the floor in Graham’s signature way.

He followed Graham into his bedroom and, after looking around, sat down tentatively on the edge of his bed, or rather the mess of sheets and pillows that resembled one.

“Sorry for the mess.” Graham apologized. On the whole, he was starting to realize that this whole thing was a terrible idea. He was not, perhaps, very comfortable with the idea of Damon sitting on his bed, but on the other hand, the polite side of him couldn’t fathom asking Damon to sit somewhere unglamorous like the floor. “Essy doesn't really come up here much.”

“Doesn’t she sleep up here?”

“Yeah.” Graham muttered, scratching his nose. “We’re on a bit of a break at the moment.”

Damon frowned. “Oh, I’m sorry.”

“It’s alright. We do this every so often...drive each other a bit mad...but then, you know, we always make up, eventually.” Graham shrugged, half-smiling.

“Sounds familiar.” Damon smirked behind his cup and took a sip of his tea.

“So how’s family life…you know…with Suzi?” Graham clearly hadn’t heard Damon, or had chosen to ignore him.

“It’s great.” Damon lowered his chin, looking up at him. He had about moved two inches closer in the last minute, and Graham could feel a fresh ball of anxiety beginning to well up in his throat.

“Gra, listen, I know you don’t want to talk about this, it’s okay.”

“Oh!” Graham blurted out suddenly, jumping up from the bed. “You’re out of tea. I’ll make you some more.”

“Gra—” Damon laughed.

“It’s okay, I’ll be back in a jif.”

Graham quickly disappeared down the stairs and Damon shook his head, amused by his nervy behavior. With sleepy eyes, he quietly surveyed the room, perusing the half-organized shelves full of collectibles and oddities. He recognized a few awards, then some weird action figures he couldn’t place, and then some bits of paper with scratchy writing on them—lyrics, Damon guessed. He picked up the stack of papers and began to thumb through them.

Peering down at the first line of the first page Damon noticed his own name written out in black ink, and followed by a few short paragraphs underneath. It was a letter addressed to him. He did not recognize them. The message ended half-way through a paragraph; the rest of the letter was unfinished. He flipped through a few more, all of them starting with “Damon—” and then followed by an unfinished block of text underneath. His stomach turned over in a familiar way.

“I got you fresh tea.” Graham announced excitedly as he reappeared at the top of the stairs, and Damon quickly stuffed the letters back onto the shelf.

Walking much too quickly, Graham stepped toward him and tripped on a misplaced book, hurdling forward head first and spilling hot tea all over the front of Damon’s shirt.

“Oh shit.” Graham’s eyes widened. “Shit. Shit. Shit. I’m sorry.”

Damon glanced down at his shirt and laughed. “It’s okay, I needed to take a shower, and to be honest I was a bit cold anyway.”

“Are you sure? Didn’t that scald you? Oh god, I’m so sorry. Here, I’ll

get you another shirt and we can put that in the wash right now." Graham turned toward his closet overflowing with clothes.

"Here." He turned around, offering a fresh shirt to Damon. Damon was already in the process of peeling his soiled shirt off and lifting it over his head. Pale white skin peeked out from underneath the wet shirt, hips, stomach, and chest. It took Graham almost a half minute before he caught himself staring. He blinked and looked away, paranoid that Damon may have seen him looking. Damon pulled the shirt on slowly, excruciatingly slowly, and it was making Graham god awfully nervous.

"Graham." Damon said to get his attention. Damon still didn't have the shirt entirely on. *Good hell,* he thought.

"Yeah?" Graham replied, turning around.

"This is a nice shirt." Damon said quietly. He smiled, and Graham's eyes momentarily drifted downward.

"Yeah. It looks nice on you. Better than me. Maybe you should keep it."

Damon cleared his throat to break the awkward silence. "I just realized, I have to be back at the venue tomorrow morning. This might be a lot to ask, but could I take a quick shower and stay here tonight? I just don't want to travel back to London this late if I'm coming back in the morning anyway, y'know?"

"What about Suzi?"

"She'll be fine. I'll text her. She'll understand."

"Um, yeah, I guess you can. I mean...of course you can use the shower. Um, but I only have one bed."

"You know what, nevermind." Damon waved his hand. "It's fine, I'll just take a taxi back tonight. I don't want to impose on you."

"No, no. You should stay." Graham nodded, scratching his face nervously. "We'll sleep military style or whatever." He added.

"How does that work exactly? We sleep butt to butt?"

"Pretty much. And we'll put a pool noodle in the middle in case either of us spills over." Graham joked. Damon laughed, and Graham wanted

him again. The drama, the pain, the desperation. He wanted the whole damn thing.

Immediately wiping the smile from his face, Graham pointed toward the bathroom. “The uh, shower is in there. And there’s some clean towels on the rack.” He knit his brows together. “It’s also a mess in there, probably. Sorry.”

“Thanks, Gra.” Damon smiled at him softly and then headed toward the shower and shut the door.

Graham could hear the faint sound of the shower being turned on from behind the door. He quickly turned around, nervously picking up loose objects from the floor and setting them on shelves. His face went blank as he remembered something that he’d forgotten about.

Rapping his knuckles on the bathroom door, Graham shouted, “Damon! I forgot to put new towels in there. I’m sorry. I have some here.”

After a quiet moment or two he heard what sounded like the awkward shuffling of feet on the other side and Damon slowly opened the door. He was holding Graham’s t-shirt pinched between two pairs of fingers over his private bits. Graham was too shocked at seeing him that naked again to say anything, until Damon cleared his throat.

“Oh, here. Sorry, Christ.” Graham shook his head and handed Damon a towel. He averted his gaze. Damon playfully tossed his t-shirt over Graham’s head with one hand and simultaneously wrapped the towel around himself with the other.

Graham looked up again. Damon’s hair was dripping wet and he was naked as sin from the waist up. He still looked good after all these years. Not good, great. *God,* he thought. *God, I can’t do this.*

“What’s wrong?” Damon finally asked.

“Nothing.” Graham pursed his lips. He was trying, in vain, to look somewhere, anywhere, other than Damon’s chest. “Nothing at all.” He handed his t-shirt back to Damon.

Folding his arms back, Damon fell backward onto the bed with a loud sigh, and Graham, feeling an animal sense of need, wanted nothing more than to climb on top of him right then and there and rip the fucking towel off of him. He tried to shake the thought out of his head.

He sat down gingerly on the edge of the bed, making a point to keep a wide distance between them. He wanted to play it safe; he didn't trust his body or his brain to be reasonable at the moment.

Damon was the first to break the silence. "You know, I remember when we were kids, you were always so self-conscious of yourself. I never understood it. Every time you changed you had to go into the bathroom because you were so embarrassed."

Graham felt the blood rush to his cheeks. "Yeah, well anyone would be self-conscious around you."

Pulling on his t-shirt, Damon turned his head to look at him. "What do you mean?"

"Really?" Graham looked at him as though he were daft. "I mean, God, look at you." He laughed. "You can have your pants halfway down your arse and you still look fine. I can't do that. I'd scare everyone away."

Graham looked down at his hands. "Not to mention in college, all the girls wanted to get with you. And I would just stand there, like the ugly friend trying to get sloppy seconds."

"You are *not* ugly, Gra. Don't you ever say that."

"Yeah, well, if you say so." Graham replied half-heartedly, picking at his fingernails.

"Do you really think that?"

"Think what?"

"That you're ugly."

"Well, when I'm standing in a band next to you and Alex, yeah."

Damon shook his head and sighed. "Gra, you are literally the most oblivious person I have ever met."

Graham felt a dull, sinking sensation in his stomach and, before he knew it, the feeling of hopelessness, the playing in his brain of certain perfect scenarios between him and Damon that had plagued him six years ago rolled over him once again.

He laid down on the bed, still concentrating on his fingernails. "Well, I don't know about you, but I think I'm going to bed. I'm quite tired."

Stretching the sheets over himself, he moved to turn off the bedside lamp.

Falling back, his arm accidentally bumped into Damon's. "Sorry," he muttered incoherently, and turned over on his side so he wasn't facing him. Eyes open, he stared into the unending darkness of his room. He could hear Damon breathing softly behind him. Fidgeting, he readjusted his pillow, trying in vain to shove any thought of wanting to touch Damon out of his head.

After a few minutes he turned onto his back, his mind racing too much fast for him to find any solace in sleep. Damon's body shifted on the bed next to him, and it reminded him of all the times Damon would hog the bed they were sleeping in and leave him the thinnest slice of mattress to sleep on.

Damon moved again, this time inching closer to him and Graham opened his mouth to protest. "Damon, you can't—"

Without warning, Damon moved two inches forward, slipped a hand around the back of his neck, and kissed him so fervently that for a moment Graham feared his head would have fallen off had Damon not already been holding it. Damon hips pushed against his own, and his free hand reached around the small of Graham's back to pull them together.

Graham's eyes had become blank discs. Damon's face was entirely covered in shadow. He could not read him.

Then, just as quickly as he'd moved a moment ago, Damon pulled back and laid on his back.

"I'm sorry, I just—" He exhaled slowly, his stomach sinking backward into the mattress. "Today was just...a lot of emotion...seeing you again."

Graham stared back at him in the darkness. He wasn't sure what he expected Damon to do.

"That was wrong. I shouldn't have done that, I'm sorry."

Graham's brain felt as though it had left both his body and the atmosphere in some grandiose Major Tom act of fervency.

"It's okay." He said finally.

“No, I shouldn't be doing this anymore.” Damon shook his head.

“Doing what?”

“Cheating.”

Graham eyes darted across Damon’s face, trying to read him in the darkness.

“Besides, I don’t even know if you still…” Damon said meekly. “That was very stupid.” He got up from the bed. “I should go.”

Graham grabbed him by the arm. “No.” There was a shine in his eyes that was halfway hopeful. “Don’t leave.”

It took every ounce of willpower in his body not to reach his other arm out and pull Damon in toward him right then, to slip his hand gently around the curve of his back and kiss him again in all the places he remembered so well.

Damon reluctantly sat back down on the bed. He sighed and shook his head. “I don’t know what came over me, Gra. I’m really sorry. All of that happened…such a long time ago. I didn’t even think I could feel that anymore…something with that much intensity.”

Graham chose his next few words carefully. “It’s alright…I don’t mind you kissing me, you know. It’s like, it’s always been that way with us.” He nervously scratched the back of his head.

“Like what way?” asked Damon dryly.

“You know, like…” Graham hesitated for a moment. It would cost him something to tell the truth this time. “Like we’re brothers, I guess.”

Graham could see the light dying in Damon’s eyes as those last few words rolled off his tongue. *Brothers.* He was lying. But he couldn’t tell the truth. He couldn’t fall back into this, even though he wanted to. Not with Essy, not with Pepper.

Damon went quiet, and a tense stillness sunk into the room. Graham did not know how long he had sat there in silence before the sound of Damon’s voice interrupted his musings and he looked up.

“You’re the only thing I want.”

“What?”

“That’s what you said, in your letters to me. ‘You’re the only thing I want.’”

Graham narrowed his eyes. “What letters?”

“The ones on your shelf.”

Graham inhaled sharply, his eyes immediately went red. “Those weren’t yours to look at, Damon.”

“I know—”

“Those were private letters.” Graham said firmly, his voice heightening. “Very private letters, and you had no business looking at them.”

“They were addressed to me.” Damon said in a low voice, looking down.

“Fucking hell, that doesn’t mean you can read them.” Graham shook his head. “How many did you read?”

“Just one.”

Graham pursed his lips. He shook his head again. “You know what, I wrote those a long time ago.”

“No, you didn’t. I saw the dates on them. You wrote them last year.”

“Well, then I was on drugs when I wrote them or…out of my mind or something, I don’t know.”

Damon parted his lips. “Graham—”

“I have a family, Damon.” Graham said loudly. Then, with a somberness in his voice, he added, “As do you.”

Damon circled his right shoulder. “We’ve always had a *something,* Gra. That’s the problem. That’s always been the problem. The difference now is that we’re grown up.”

“So, what exactly are you suggesting, that we just carry on where we left off and announce to the world that we love each other? Yeah, I can just see the headlines now.” Graham scrunched up his nose. “Come on, Damon. That’s not how life works.”

Damon looked back him sadly.

Graham gave him a pitiful look. “Look, I fell in love with you when I was seventeen years old. I didn’t know my head from my arse back then, okay?”

“And what about now?”

“Now?” Graham looked up at the ceiling. “God, Damon. I don’t know. What do you want me to say? That now I’m just a fucked-up remainder of all the things in my life I never resolved? Is that what you want to hear? That I need you?”

“Graham.” Damon said quietly. “Stop. Running. No one’s trying to catch you.”

Graham’s chest was still heaving. He took a deep breath, looking back at Damon in the darkness.

“I’m not asking you to do anything. I just missed my friend, okay?” Damon’s eyes reflected the streetlights outside his window, and Graham saw that his eyes were wet. “I just missed my friend, my best friend, who I have very confused feelings for that sometimes slip out in embarrassing ways.”

Graham smiled sadly. “I know the feeling.”

There was another long silence and then Graham spoke again. “You know, I hated you for a long time.” He began picking at his fingernails again. “I just thought you were so mad at me. And that day, that day you kicked me out I was going to tell you everything, fess up you know, as to why I’d been so weird and flakey.”

“What were you going to tell me?”

“I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Tell me.”

Graham looked down at his hands. Unwaveringly, he decided to tell the truth this time. “I tried to off myself, after the Singles tour. I went home drunk after Anna had screamed at me, and I pulled a rope around my neck and I thought, you know, fuck it.”

He looked pensively outside the window at the glowing streetlights. Damon was just a silhouette in the corner of his vision.

“I had to get away you know...I was sick. I was in the mental hospital

twice. You were off doing Gorillaz and then I thought, well maybe I'll try to do my own thing because I guess I was a bit jealous, and I just had all these thoughts...all these confused thoughts in my head about you and Pepper and Anna. And I waited to tell you for so long because I knew that you wouldn't speak to me if I told you the truth." He laughed sadly. "But then we ended up not speaking to each other anyway so it didn't really matter, did it?"

Damon placed a hand on his shoulder. "Why didn't you call me back?"

"When?"

"The day after…"

"The day after you kicked me out?"

Damon frowned. "You were never kicked out, Graham. Alex was being overly dramatic. I tried calling you to explain everything and you never called me back."

"I dunno." Graham began picking at his fingernails again. "I was just so embarrassed, and the longer I didn't call you the worse I felt about calling you."

Graham felt Damon's hand squeeze his shoulder.

"I would have been there for you, Gra."

"You were so angry at me."

"I was angry back then because I wanted something that I could never have, and it took me a lot of years and a lot of pain to figure that out. That was my fault."

"And? What about now?"

"Now?" Damon smiled softly. "Now I'm just happy when there's birds outside the window and I've got a melody in my head, and I wake up next to someone that I love."

Graham felt himself deflate, his head sinking backward into the bed. Saying nothing, Damon reached out and held his hand.

"You're so cheesy." Graham shot him a small grin.

Damon laid back down on the bed. He looked up at the ceiling and exhaled loudly. "God, you know I would fuck your brains out right

now if you let me."

Graham smiled, and laughed softly. "I know you would."

"Will you at least settle for letting me hold you?"

"You mean cuddling?"

"Well, that sounds wildly less romantic."

"I think I'm okay with that."

"What about a kiss?"

"...Okay, I guess."

Damon inched forward, pressing his dry lips against his and Graham parted his lips, partially out of some old instinct, and partially because he wanted to. He closed his eyes, allowing Damon to kiss him, like how he used to. And he thought of lying in Damon's old bed, with the warm sun on his cheek, kissing his best friend for the very first time as his heart raced like a runaway train, not knowing what would happen, knowing very well that it could go one way or the other, but trusting that everything would be okay in the end.

Hong Kong: Part 1

“We’re kids, aren't we?
Yes, kids with grown-up powers.”

— Lang Leav, Lullabies

“Just let me film you.”

“No.”

“It’ll just be for a second, I promise. No one will ever see this.”

“I don’t trust that at all.”

“Just thirty seconds!”

“No. You’re going to put this on some special features bit—all ‘here’s Graham’s ugly mug behind-the-scenes’—I know you, Damon.”

Damon lowered his iPad. “You’re no fun at all, Gra.” Looking down, he pressed the record button.

“Did you just hit record?”

Damon shook his head, holding back a grin. “No.”

“You are the worst liar. Gimme that.” Graham wrestled the iPad out of Damon’s hands and looked down at it. “Ugh. No. How do I delete this?” He looked up at Damon who shrugged his shoulders like a guiltless child.

Graham sighed loudly and handed the iPad back to Damon. He crossed his arms over his chest. “So, are we doing this or what?”

“What are we doing again?”

Graham looked at him incredulously. “You said you wanted to see Hong Kong one last time, remember? That’s why you dragged me out of my hotel room at this witching hour…” He paused to check his watch. “Ten o’clock at night, when you know that I have—we both

have—a godawful early flight tomorrow."

"Ten, really?" Damon taunted. "The old Graham Coxon I used to know ate his breakfast at ten o'clock at night."

Graham narrowed his eyes and jokingly tossed Damon the finger. "Yeah, well the old luddite Damon Albarn I knew wouldn't be caught dead with an iPad either."

"Touché." Damon wrapped an arm around Graham's shoulders. "Alright, where do you want to go?"

"Let's take the tube to Mong Kok again. I want to find those biscuits we had the other day."

"Sounds like a plan."

**

Graham felt overwhelmed as they stepped out of the station into Mong Kok. Craning his neck upward, he could barely see a wide and intact sky; it was just enough that he could glimpse its whole face amongst the all the neon and smells of food wafting out of corner street stands. He snapped back to reality as someone bumped into his shoulder and, before he could even process it, felt Damon grab his hand and begin to navigate them through the sidewalk maze in front of them.

A few blocks down, Damon stopped and pulled him into a warm, dimly-lit restaurant with lovely smells.

"What is this place?"

"The best dim sum you'll ever have. Trust me. Alex and I went here last night."

"We're not getting biscuits then?"

"We'll get biscuits later, Graham. This is important."

Damon slid into a seat at one of the booths and Graham followed, standing next to the table and unraveling himself from the tangled mess of scarves and trench coat he'd bound himself in.

"You really go all the way these days, don't you?" Damon mused, motioning toward Graham's outfit. He looked as though he were about to laugh. "I don't remember you caring this much."

“Well, at least one person this band needs to look like they can dress themselves.”

“Ouch. I’ll make sure to tell that to Alex later.” Damon flashed his eyes at him and Graham looked away, blushing. Damon propped up his iPad.

Graham shook his head and flattened the iPad with his hand. He laughed. “ *No.* We talked about this remember? You’ve been non-stop filming me for the last three days. What are you going to do with all that footage?”

Failing an attempt to look innocent, Damon propped the iPad back up on the table. “It’s not even on. And besides, everything I’ve filmed is for posterity. For the future documentary they will make about you.”

Graham glanced up as their hostess set tea down on their table, and then looked back at Damon with narrowed eyes. “So, is this just random footage, or are you going to interview me for this or what?”

Damon raised both eyebrows. “Now that you mention it, I do have some questions, actually.”

“How ‘bout,” Graham grabbed the iPad and slowly pulled it toward him. He turned it around. “I interview you.” He pressed the record button.

“Okay,” Damon looked into straight into the camera then back at Graham. “But you haven’t got me at my good angle.”

“As if. Alright. Ready?”

“Ready.”

“What’s your favorite thing to do?”

Damon laughed. “God, really? That’s the question you’re going with?”

“Yep.”

“Okay. My favorite thing to do is hang out with Graham.”

“Oh god, that’s cheesy Damon. Come on.”

“Ask a cheesy question, get a cheesy answer. That’s how it goes.”

“Okay, let’s try this again. How about… What are your absolute, top

favorite things?"

Damon tugged at his earlobe and looked as though he were deep in thought. "Hmm, that's a hard one, lemme think..." After a brief pause he finally said, "The sound of rain outside a tour bus."

Graham lightly rolled his eyes. "Cheesy," he muttered underneath his breath.

"The way people look when they're a bit tired, you know. Like they've been awake a little too long, seen lots of things."

"Hmm. Okay."

Damon's eyes flicked up to look at him. He smiled softly. "Iceland."

Graham stared down at his hands and fidgeted with the iPad.

"Watching someone sleep."

Graham's eyes widened. "Well, that's not creepy at all."

"Brown eyes."

Graham cleared his throat.

"Hot tea."

"Great. You know what, I think that's enough questions for now." Graham snapped the iPad case shut and placed it on top of his bag.

Damon, acting like he hadn't noticed Graham's discomfort whatsoever, cleared his throat and casually leaned back into his seat. "So, what are you going to do when you get home?"

Graham shrugged his shoulders, looking off into the distance. "I dunno. It's going to be weird going back to normal life after all this."

"Without a record being done, you mean?"

"Yeah, I guess. I mean…" Graham bit his bottom lip. "It kinda felt like we were our old selves again for a moment, you know? Just worrying about the music, none of the drama."

"Yeah." Damon leaned his head against the palm of his hand and peered up at Graham. "We were a lot of drama, weren't we?"

Graham nervously flipped the paper tag on his tea bag over and over.

Damon put his left hand over his, and Graham remembered how Damon used to do this every time he felt bad for someone but didn't know what to say. He'd cup his hands over yours, then he'd look up and smile at you in that signature sleepy Damon way, the way that made you hate him or love him depending on your mood.

Damon opened his mouth to speak again, but before he could say anything Graham interrupted him.

"I should probably head back to the hotel."

Damon gave him a hurt look. "Why?"

"It's late, and I'm worried about my flight tomorrow. I'm sorry."

Damon pulled his hand, his eyes urging him to stay.

"Listen, Dames…" Graham looked down at the placemat. "I don't know where you're going with this tonight, um, you know, digging up old memories and all that, but I can't really…" He drew invisible circles on the tablecloth with his index finger. His voice was getting smaller and smaller. "I'm not in the position to really react to that right now."

"Gra, look, I didn't mean to make you feel—"

"I'm going to go." Graham mumbled as he stood up and grabbed his bag and jacket.

Damon looked like he was in pain now. "Graham, wait."

"I'm sorry." Graham frowned, then turning, headed out the door and into the pouring rain.

**

When Graham finally got back to his hotel room, he realized he had two problems. One, he still had Damon's iPad. Two, his phone was almost dead and Damon had his phone charger. *Fuck*, he thought. He had to see him now.

Rubbing his eyes, he sat down on the edge of his bed, holding Damon's iPad between his hands. He knew he had some time to kill before Damon returned, so he pressed the button to turn it on. He shook his head. Damon didn't even have a passcode on the damn

thing.

Squinting down at the bright screen, he tapped on the videos app. He wanted to see if there was something hugely embarrassing that he could delete. A giant library of videos stared back at him. *Jesus* , he thought. For someone who refused to have a cell phone for years, Damon certainly enjoyed looking at the world through a screen.

His phone buzzed next to him. It was a text from Damon.

I believe you have something of mine.

Graham pursed his lips and quickly hammered in a reply.

Yep.

He clenched his jaw. His phone told him that Damon was typing, and then after about thirty seconds of annoyed anticipation, he set his phone back down. After a deep breath, he picked up the iPad again and pressed on one of the more recent videos.

He winced as he saw a past version of himself from two days ago standing in the train station. The video shook as it walked toward him.

Graham grimaced. “No, not again.” He held his hand up to the camera to cover his face. “Really, Dames.”

“No, just wait. I have an idea. Here, hold this.” The video spun around and suddenly Damon’s smirking face appeared. “Do you think they’re scared of zombies here?”

“What?”

“Hold on.” Damon grinned and began walking backward away from him toward the entrance of the station.

“Oh god, no. Damon, don’t.” He could hear his own voice groaning from behind the camera. “Not again. Please. Not here.”

Damon motioned toward the camera Graham was holding and mouthed, “come on.”

Graham pleaded with him again. “Damon. No.”

Damon lifted his arms and began walking toward him slowly with his eyes crossed and his bottom jaw hanging and off to the side. *Not this*

again , Graham thought. *Not the zombie impression again.*

Damon made a moaning growl as he walked toward him. The camera began to shake and Graham could hear himself laughing from behind the camera. “Jesus Christ, Damon...”

Some of the nearby people had begun to stare at Damon’s laughable attempt at a zombie impression and Damon stuck his tongue out in response, hamming it up for his new audience.

“Dames, stop.” Graham begged him, laughing from behind the camera. “Please stop.”

Damon, getting closer and closer to the camera, splayed his arms out, tongue still hanging from his mouth, growled loudly as he pretended to attack Graham.

“Get off me, you bastard!” The camera spun and shook as Graham laughed uncontrollably, trying to push Damon off of him. He could hear himself trying to catch his breath from behind the camera. “Goddammit, I hate you so much right now.”

Damon finally relented, pulling back and grinning before giving him a kiss on the cheek.

”You cheeky bastard, I hate you.”

“No you don’t, you love me.” Damon smirked, fussing with Graham’s hair. He took the iPad from him and a few seconds later the video went black.

Graham smiled down at the iPad. *That idiot* , he thought. He shook his head and clicked on another video.

The camera spun dizzyingly for a few seconds before Damon’s disgruntled face suddenly appeared, brows knitted in normal fashion, staring directly into the camera. He was sitting in what Graham recognized as the kitchen of their small studio space, an acoustic guitar splayed across his chest. Damon cleared his throat, then began to strum some chords. He was playing a song Graham recognized from a jam session earlier that week.

Graham moved to stop the video, but paused as soon as he saw Alex walk into the frame. Damon looked up, nonplussed, still humming loudly to the chords of the song he was playing. Alex was pouring himself another cup of tea—probably his tenth one that day, Graham

mused. Even though they were all sober now—well, most of them—Graham was impressed that Alex still had his touch of hedonism; he never did anything in moderation.

Quietly sipping his tea, Alex turned to face Damon. Damon frowned into the camera and stopped playing.

Alex raised his cup of tea toward him. “Sounds like you’ve almost got it.”

Damon sighed. “Not quite. I’ll see what Graham thinks about it.”

Alex took another sip of his tea, and after a brief pause said, “So, what do you think about Graham anyway?”

Damon twisted in his seat to look back at him.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, the last few days he’s been a bit…odd. You know. Like how he used to be.”

Damon furrowed his brow and said, “I’m not following.”

“You know how he always gets before he goes a bit mental. He gets very quiet, and then he isolates himself.”

Damon bit his upper lip. “Yeah. I guess so.”

“Are you two getting it on with each other again?”

Damon’s eyes narrowed into crinkled slits. “What?”

“You know, are you playing with each other's balloon knots or whatever.”

Damon scrunched up his nose. “God, Alex. That is disgusting.”

“You didn’t use to think so.”

“Why?” Damon raised his eyebrows accusingly. He looked visibly annoyed. “Are you?”

“Gods, no.” Alex replied wryly. He facetiously signed a cross over his chest. “I’m a good Christian boy now.”

Damon rolled his eyes at him. “No, Alex. I haven’t, and I wouldn’t

want to. And I'm sure he wouldn't want to either."

"Well, that's very mature of the both of you." Alex touched his chin. "It's just strange, you know...because he only used to act like this when you were both on the outs with each other."

"Jesus, Alex." Damon laughed, and when he faced the camera again Graham could see that his cheeks were a bit red. "Just drop it. It's like you're working for the fucking Sun or something."

Damon finally noticed that his iPad was still recording and muttered some expletive underneath his breath. He turned back to Alex. "Look, Graham is fine. He'll snap out of it, like he always does."

Alex sighed, "We'll see."

As soon as the video ended, Graham rubbed his face with his hands and let out a long, deep exhale. He set the iPad down; his phone buzzed with another text from Damon.

In my room.

He stared down at the screen, anxiety already welling up in his throat. He was doing it again, wasn't he? Graham thought. He was losing it, and everyone could tell. The whole band could see it. His fingers hesitated over the keypad. He didn't want to see Damon again tonight, not really. Not now. Not with the way his head was.

He began to stride blindly around the room, picking his phone up only to replace it again on the bed seconds later as Alex's words echoed in his head: *You know how he gets before he goes a bit mental.*

He looked out his window out at the sea of city lights that seemed to stretch out endlessly. He sat down hard on his bed. His phone glowed back at him, he picked it up and turned it over in his fingers, thinking, thinking of Damon and Alex talking about him having a breakdown, losing the plot. Maybe he was losing the plot, he thought. Maybe this was just the beginning, and it was going to be what happened a decade ago repeating itself all over again. He bit his chapped lips, a habit he'd gotten into now that his anxiety was resurfacing, and tasted iron.

"Fuck." He muttered underneath his breath. He quickly typed into his phone:

Coming over now. Are you awake?

He stared down at the bright screen for what felt like an eternity, waiting for a response. Nothing.

Clenching and unclenching his fists, he willed himself up as best he could, snatched the iPad off the bed, and headed out of his room and down the hall toward Damon's room.

Fingers twitching, he knocked on Damon's door three times and waited. His palms were sweaty. He didn't know why he was so scared to talk to him. Maybe it was just the thought of confrontation or maybe it was the fear that he'd slipped too far this time; maybe the band was really sick of him and Damon would tell him, once again, that they really didn't need him to finish this tour. He felt a panic coming on.

He knocked again. "Damon?" He shouted against the door. No answer. Biting his nails, he tried the doorknob and the door slowly swung open. Arching his neck, he peered into the room. Damon's bed was still neatly made, empty.

"Damon?"

He took a few timid steps in. He could hear the shower running, and the door to the bathroom was wide open. He surveyed the room quietly, then after a few nervy moments of trying to decide whether or not to leave, sat down on the edge of the bed.

Five minutes passed before he heard the sound of the shower head being turned off, and Damon's footsteps padding against the wet linoleum. He emerged out of the bathroom seconds later, drying his hair with a towel, and completely oblivious to Graham's presence. Graham watched him cross the room and check his phone.

Finally, he cleared his throat, and Damon nearly jumped five feet in the air. He spun around to see Graham sitting on his bed.

"Jesus Christ." He laughed. "You scared the shit out of me. I didn't see you there."

Graham smiled weakly. He held out the iPad. "You have my phone charger."

Damon's eyes lit up. "Oh, right." He crossed the room and opened the bedside drawer. "Here," he said, offering him the cord.

Graham looked back at him blankly as he held it out, not taking it.

Damon eyed him with concern. “What’s wrong?”

Graham’s eyes drifted downward. A white towel was tucked around Damon’s waist, wet blonde hair hanging over his eyes in a scraggly mess. It wasn’t anything Graham hadn’t seen before, in a hundred different dressing rooms after a hundred different gigs, but for whatever reason, seeing him like this tonight, in this way, struck him with overwhelming anxiety.

Bright blue eyes stared back at him, full of optimism, full of worry. And for a brief moment, Graham wished he had the courage not to fight and doubt everything. He wished, just for once, that he could say, ‘This. This is good enough.’

“Gra? What’s wrong?” Damon asked him again, putting a hand his shoulder. “Did I say something?”

Quiet and unresponsive, Graham stood up from the bed. His eyes dropped to the floor and he began biting his nails again. He headed toward the door.

“Graham.” Damon said loudly, and Graham ignored him again, opening the door without a word and walking down the hallway.

Damon quickly pulled his t-shirt over his head and stumbled leg-by-leg into his trousers. He stuffed his feet into his Adidas without tying them, and followed him out the door. Graham was already a tiny dot at the end of the hallway.

“Graham, wait!” Damon yelled after him, still struggling to put on one of his shoes. He sprinted down the hallway in the direction he thought he’d seen him go. By the time he reached the hotel lobby, Graham was nowhere to be seen. Panicking, he ran out through the double doors of the hotel and looked down both sides of the street. He spotted Graham to his left, pacing down the sidewalk as quickly as possible.

Although it wasn’t raining anymore, the air was still heavy with water, and the rain gutters were spilling over into a thousand different pools, all of them mirroring the neon lights in a way that made the sleeping city look as though it was on fire. Damon ran down the street toward Graham, his feet kicking water everywhere. He cursed Graham in his head. He was going to have a cold tomorrow because of this.

He watched as Graham disappeared at the end of the street and, taking in ragged breaths, ran as fast as he could after him. Crossing the intersection, he nearly jumped out of his skin as a car zoomed past

him at breakneck speed, just a foot shy from flattening him. The soles of his shoes slipped across the wet asphalt, so much so that he almost entirely ran past the street he'd seen Graham turn down before realizing that he needed to double back. Approaching a hidden back street, he spotted him, propped up against a brick wall, meek, staring back at him with wide, frightened eyes. And as he got closer, he could tell that Graham's breath was just as ragged and forced as his was.

Damon wavered just a few feet away from him, unsure what to do, his wet hair plastered across his forehead and his shoelaces untied and ruined in some knotted muddy mess. His clothes were completely drenched from the car that had nearly hit him earlier. He must have looked like a right idiot, he thought, chasing a full-grown man down the street in the middle of the night, like a parent panicking like they'd lost a child.

He approached Graham tentatively, and noticed as he got closer that he was shaking. He was clutching his elbows and making little noises and gasping for air. His eyes were circles of red, bloodshot and panicked. Damon recognized this expression as the same one he'd seen many years ago, when he'd touched him and Graham had crumpled into a mess of panic and tears for no reason at all.

Cautiously, he wrapped his arms around Graham's shoulders, pulling him in toward his chest. Graham was stiff as a board, stifled, his arms glued to his sides as though moving at all would somehow indicate defeat on his end. Damon held him tighter, whispering softly into his ear, "It's okay. You're going to be okay."

After a minute or so, he could hear Graham's panicked breaths beginning to slow down, and his body relaxed a little underneath him.

Damon didn't know what to say him then. He'd never known what to say to him, really. No matter how much he slept or how much coffee he drank or how long he lied down, he could never figure out what to say to him about all this, about everything.

Back when they were young and foolish, whatever he and Graham had felt for each other was right, that much he knew. But now that they were old and wiser, and the world had shifted around them, it all seemed a bit wrong. And more and more, it felt like they were trying to make logic of something that didn't make sense. None of this made any sense, and that was point. It would never make sense, and he was okay with that, even if Graham was not.

In the end, he realized he was drunk, still drunk on the idea of them, so much so that he believed that if he just shut his eyes and let things happen, just let things lie as they were, that maybe he could remember what it felt like to fall in love with him all over again.

Pulling back, he took Graham's hand, and Graham looked back at him with two or three conflicting emotions—distrust, fear, love, maybe—he couldn't tell which one was winning anymore. Squeezing his hand tightly, he pulled them both out onto the street and led them both back toward the hotel.

Hong Kong: Part 2

Lord hear me now
Junk boats and English boys

You swallow me
I'm just a pill on your tongue
Up here on the nineteenth floor
The neon lights make me come

Graham was bleeding. Damon hadn't noticed it when they were walking back, but it was obvious now that they were in the hotel again and the light revealed a large bloody scuff on his knee where he must have fallen down while he was running.

Pushing open the door, Damon placed a hand on the small of his back and coaxed him into his room. Damon had said nothing to him the entire way back, instead he'd just held his hand and listened to the sound of Graham trying to muffle his panicked breathing as he walked beside him.

Graham sat down on the floor, not the bed, and leaned up against the mattress with his legs kicked out. He was shaking still, but less so than before, and Damon helped him remove his coat and stretched a warm blanket over his chest. Reaching into his travel bag, he dug around for his first aid kit. He held both a bandage and a bottle of peroxide in both hands, looking down at Graham who looked back up at him blearily. Damon squatted down in front of him, studying him with concerned eyes. Graham wasn't crying anymore, but he also wasn't looking at him, and Damon had a feeling that he really didn't want to.

Damon moved to undo the button on Graham's trousers and Graham, snapping to attention, immediately grabbed his wrist, stopping him. He looked back at Damon with distrust in his eyes. Damon lifted up both the band-aid and the peroxide as if to say, "look, I'm just trying to help" and slowly Graham removed his hand. Pulling his jeans off of him, Damon could see that already a good amount of blood had run down his leg just from walking back to the hotel.

Damon delicately swabbed the cut on his knee and Graham winced. He reached out, briefly rubbing Graham's shoulder, and then using his free hand grabbed the band-aid and placed it over his knee. Feeling a bit ridiculous, Damon helped him back into his jeans, and Graham sunk back again against the side of the mattress.

Damon tucked a strand of hair behind Graham's ear and watched him quietly, trying to read him. Leaning in, he briefly kissed him on the cheek, and Graham, finally, lifted his eyes to look at him. He pulled back, studying his face, trying to make sense of what Graham was feeling or wanting and what he could possibly do about it. He had no idea. He was just trying to listen.

Graham's eyes no longer looked fearful, but sad, as though some sort of regret or melancholy was ripping through him all at once. Humiliated and and hidden behind his eyelids, Damon softly kissed his cheekbone with chapped lips.

He held Graham's cold palms in his hands, lightly stroking them his thumbs. His eyes darted back and forth across his friend's face. He was trying to ask a question he wasn't sure if Graham understood anymore. It was a question he had worn on his lips for so long now that it had given him countless sleepless nights on tour buses, staring out at endless stretches of American highways, writing lyrics about a year he could never quite understand because of the way Graham had brushed past him the night of their last show, his fingers briefly touching his as he left the stage, the look in his eyes as he smiled and said, "I love you" so plainly and unprovoked that he would have guessed Graham hadn't said it all had he not seen his lips moving.

Graham straightened his back, looking back at him with uncertain eyes. After a few seconds passed, he nodded so slightly that Damon barely registered the movement at all. He swallowed slowly, and Damon placed his hand on his cheek, asking again, just to make sure. He took a deep breath, then gripped Damon's hand tightly.

Leaning forward, Damon's drew his thumb across the top of Graham's lips, quietly admiring the way the top one, bowed and fragile, complimented the full and pouted one below. Graham had changed over the years, yes, but—Damon noted with a tinge of jealousy—very few of his features betrayed his age compared to the rest of them; he could still glimpse the boy he'd met at Stanway all those years ago, the one with rosebud lips and soft brown eyes hiding behind a wall of a wall of a wall of himself.

Slipping a hand around the back of his neck, Damon leaned in, blue eyes flicking upward to meet brown, and pressed his lips to his. It lasted no more than a second really, but Graham exhaled slowly as Damon pulled back, his whole body seeming to collapse in a way, as though some great weight had been lifted off him.

His thumb gently parting red and flushed lips, Damon kissed him again with their mouths open. He moved unhurriedly, each time asking with his eyes, making sure it was okay with him, that he wasn't crossing boundaries. Damon pulled his wet shirt over his head, and then placed his hands at the bottom hem of Graham's to do the same. Graham's hand stopped him again, and he looked up at Damon with shaky conviction. Understanding, Damon pulled back to give him space.

Seeing that Damon's intentions were not malign this time, that he was willing to stop, to ask, the fear in Graham's eyes seemed to pass and he removed his hand.

Damon kissed him again and gently pulled his shirt over his arms. He looked down at Graham, taking him all in, his eyes traveling over his pale, skinny chest and hips, remembering all the places he used to travel with his lips and hands, and the way Graham used to look sitting on top of him on so many memorable mornings, his eyes crinkled up at the corners of his face, laughing at something stupid he'd said.

Damon sat back, observing him, and for a moment it was as though Graham was barely there, a scarce shadow of a body framed in white skin—all legs and trembling hands. There was something broken about him, Damon thought, something ungraceful and human and irreparably flawed, but even in its shattered face it was still beautiful, it was still loved.

Damon reached his fingers out again, feeling the curved and familiar ridges of his spine as they trailed up his neck, the ones his lips knew from memory. From there, the soft arc of his jawbone as it curved into his neck, the bowing line of his cheekbone and then the corners of his eyes, which unlike all the other parts of him seemingly, finally betrayed his age.

He trailed his fingers back down the soft curve of his back, pulling their bodies closer and kissing first his shoulder, then his throat, then the soft hollow space between his collarbone. He ran callused fingertips over his bare chest, pausing just above the hem of his jeans,

and Graham let out a quiet, but sharp exhale as Damon's fingers slipped down even farther, and he kissed him again, before gripping his icy hands and urging him up off the floor.

Wordlessly, Damon began to unbutton his own trousers, and Graham, not knowing what else to do, quietly dropped to his knees, wincing as he landed on his cut knee.

Damon looked down at him with immense sadness in his eyes. Shaking his head, he mouthed what looked like a "no" and with fingers tilting his chin up, urged him to stand so that they were both on the same level. He kissed him again, this time persisting longer than all the other times and then pulled him toward the bed so that they were both lying down and facing one another.

Damon wrapped his arms around him, just holding him, just feeling their bodies against one another in a way they hadn't felt for years, and Graham softly closed his eyes. He felt Damon's warm breath against his shoulder. He didn't know how long they'd laid there, just holding each other as time passed in an incalculable way, but as Damon pulled back Graham felt his eyes well up and that familiar tightening of his throat, only to see that Damon's eyes were glassy as well.

Graham used to think he couldn't feel anything like this anymore, and if he could, that it was so buried beneath him that it was lost in an ocean of forgetting. He used to believe that the intensity of feeling he had for anything in his life faded with each passing year, but he realized now that he was wrong. He was feeling everything all at once now, like a river rushing through old bones, drowning him, carrying him back to the place and the person he'd worked so hard to walk away from for so long.

Damon had begun kissing him again, drawing in lower and lower circles with his mouth, his fingertips making delicate trails just above the hem of his jeans and he could hear Graham above him, emitting soft hums of pleasure. Using his index finger he caressed the hard, bowing curve between Graham's legs and Graham immediately arched his back in response. But before he could say anything, Damon, eyes flashing a sultry blue, parted his legs and delicately wrapped his lips over the hard thickness trapped behind the fabric of his jeans. It was then that Graham remembered, in blinding detail, the night that Damon had been magnificently high on stage and gotten too close to the microphone, closer than anyone in their right mind needed to be, and then looked over at him in the middle of a verse, licking his lips

and reacting to his guitar with his hips and bouncing and giving him *that fucking look*.

...Every night and every morning for five days after that. Both of them so sore afterward that even Dave was asking Alex what had happened.

Damon looked up at him, licking his lips and his eyes flashing, and there was a slight softening at the corners of his mouth. *Bastard.*

"Fuck." Graham gasped, trying to catch his breath.

The smile disappeared from Damon's face.

Graham already knew what Damon was going to ask; it was the question he'd had on the very tip of his tongue the entire time. He wanted to know what the point of no return would be, how far would be too far this time, but he was too afraid to ask it out loud.

Emboldened, Graham cupped Damon's face, pulling him down, and thrust his hips sharply upward. It was the answer Damon had been waiting for; his breath caught in his throat as he felt Graham's erection, hard and warm, pressing against his own.

Damon slid up and down against him, pressing himself into Graham's thigh and Graham bit back a moan. He wanted to touch himself so badly, so badly that it hurt. One hand slid down to unbutton and ease down the zipper on the denim jeans that clung to his slender frame. He slipped his hand inside, palming his own erection and looking up at Damon with glazed eyes.

Damon stared down at Graham gently stroking himself, his eyes filled with animalistic need as Graham's thumb slowly caressed the head of his own cock, lips slightly parted as a breathy moan escaped his throat, and suddenly he realized then that he'd stopped breathing.

Part of Graham wanted Damon to lose it, he wanted to see how far he could stretch him. And he *was* losing it, Graham could see it in his eyes. He was holding himself back, with every ounce of willpower that he left.

Finally inhaling, Damon's breath became ragged and he pulled himself back, running his fingers through his hair. He was avoiding eye contact. He must have been too ashamed to look at him, and Graham didn't blame him. Everything was a bit too real now.

Damon muttered a barely audible "sorry" and climbed off the bed. He

walked toward the large panel of windows and looked out at the city lights.

Graham sat up on the bed, observing him from afar. A hundred different scenarios ran through his head all at once, none of them seemed to be the right thing.

Stepping down shakily from the bed, he moved toward the window where Damon was, and standing behind him, slipped his arms underneath his shoulders. Not acknowledging him, Damon pensively looked out at the neon lights, his eyes shifting back and forth, not observing as much as thinking, or having some sort of inner dialogue inside his head.

They weren't stupid. They both were cognizant of the fact that what they were doing was wrong, for so many reasons. Reasons Graham could count on two hands and then some.

Damon pulled away from him, muttering underneath his breath, "I need to take a shower again" and Graham's hands dropped to his sides with profound heaviness.

He quietly watched as Damon walked into the bathroom and shut the door. He heard the sound of the shower head being turned on again, and he stared down at the yellow light beneath the door, thinking.

He tongued the roof of his mouth and thought and thought and thought. He thought until all the thinking felt like chaos in his head, and then he decided to stop.

He decided to let it go.

What happened next was purely intuitive. Graham pushed himself up off the bed and turned the handle on the bathroom door, tossing what remained of his clothes to the floor. He walked toward the shower and opened the door and grabbed Damon by the shoulders and kissed him. He bent down on his knees and took Damon into his warm mouth, water rushing over his head, and listened to the mewling sounds Damon made as his tongue drew intricate circles around the head of his cock. He relaxed his throat, taking him all the way in, remembering the familiar taste of his pre-cum on his tongue, Damon hard and thick and throbbing in his mouth.

Damon let out a strangled moan, and Graham felt his own cock twitch at just the thought of being able to make him feel amazing again, to make his knees shake. His right hand reached around, and without

pause, he inserted his middle finger, finding the familiar ribbed point he was looking for and stroking it. Smiling, he remembered the way he'd tied him up to a chair, so many years ago, Damon rabid with whatever amphetamines he'd taken that night, excruciatingly aware of anything that touched him because it felt like electricity on his skin, and how Graham ran his fingers up and down the length of his back as Damon begged him to fuck him, begged him again and again while Graham took him with only his finger and his mouth.

Exasperated, Damon pulled him up, his eyes glossed over with want and picked both of Graham's legs up with his hands, slamming him up against the glass wall of the shower so hard it rattled. Graham wrapped his arms around Damon's shoulders and his legs around his waist, inhaling sharply as he felt the tip of Damon's cock suddenly in-between his legs.

Damon looked directly into his eyes, his chest heaving. Again, he was asking for permission and Graham, face red and head swimming, drunk on touch and feeling and stimulation, wasn't sure that anything could convince him to do the opposite. He nodded. Damon moved slowly, first entering him with only the head of his cock, and Graham bit down into his neck softly with his teeth, bracing himself. He inhaled sharply as Damon inched himself the rest of the way in, and he felt his muscles tighten involuntarily, causing Damon to let out a throaty moan.

By the time he was all the way inside him, both of them had stopped breathing. They stood there, still, not moving. Just the feeling of Damon's warm cock completely inside him, his hands wrapped around his legs, splitting him in two—it was too much for his brain to handle, just as it had been nineteen years ago, laying in a dark motel room, scared and intoxicated and feeling like they needed whatever this was more than any other thing.

Damon began slowly moving in and out of him in long strokes, and Graham rolled his head back, soft mewls of pleasure emitting from his throat. Pulling his neck forward, Damon roughly thrust up and into him hard enough to shake the glass and Graham, moaning loudly, responded in kind by digging his fingernails into his back so hard that they both knew there would be marks there tomorrow. Biting down gently on his neck, Damon pushed open the door to the shower and carried them both back to the bedroom.

Damon moved toward the table next to the window, setting down Graham just for a moment so he could clear the table of objects with a

swipe of his hand, and then hooking his arms underneath Graham's legs again, lifted him up onto the narrow table and pushed his back into the cold glass. Graham silently gave thanks to their tour manager for getting Damon a corner room on the nineteenth floor.

Suddenly, he felt Damon on his cock, his large tongue languidly swirling around the tip of it and it was all too much. He pulled Damon's head up, his hands shaking from the overstimulation. He was too close to coming.

"I'm close…" Graham said breathlessly into his ear.

"I know." Damon nodded, his chest heaving. He threaded his fingers into the wet strands of Graham's hair. He pressed his cock into him again slowly, warm and wet and Graham's mouth fell open. Damon began to fuck him slowly, very slowly, sliding in and out in lengthy strokes and Graham nodded, acknowledging that this was an okay pace for him. Damon sunk his head into Graham's shoulder, breathing heavily. He looked out at the adjacent tower, bathed in neon, his breath making white circles of condensation on the window.

Damon pulled his head back, and Graham looked down at him, his eyes glazed over in almost a drug-like trance. He caressed Graham's lips with his thumb in the same way he had earlier, admiring how the red glow of the neon light outside the window reflected onto his face, and listening to the sound of his breath as it gently pushed in and out of him.

He didn't want this moment to end, but it was, like everything else in his life had and would. Already he could picture Graham sitting at the head of his bed, tying his shoelaces as the morning sun danced light over the freckles of his back. Already he could see Graham pulling his shirt on and giving him that look, that look that said he was going away again. Instead, he tried to picture Graham at the river, doubling over from laughter after taking a long swig of Hazel's wine and spitting it out in disgust, yelling like a maniac and cannonballing into the cold water with the wildest grin on his face.

Graham moaned his name into his shoulder as he came, and Damon followed him shortly after. Exhausted, he laid his head against Graham's chest, listening to the vibration of his heart beating against his chest.

They said nothing for several seconds, just standing there in motionless inertia, holding onto each other. Graham felt Damon's

cheek, wet against his chest, and it wasn't long before he felt his own eyes sting, tears running silently down his face.

Damon moved his chin to the crook of Graham's shoulder, his right hand reaching around to touch the back of his neck. He opened his mouth to ask the one question Graham knew he was going to ask, the one he always asked, but Graham answered him before a single word could leave his mouth.

"I won't—"

He felt his throat tighten. A voice from his distant past, small and forlorn, buried underneath a lifetime of forgetting echoed clearly in his head.

"I'm not leaving you. I made a promise." And for the first time in his life, he meant it.

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